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STUDIES
IN
THE BOOK OF ACTS

by

Charles John Vaughan

Foreword by Dr. Cyril J. Barber

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FOREWORD

I recently received a letter from a man who questioned the value of the Book of Acts. The implication in his letter was clear. Quoting 2 Timothy 3:16 he pointed out that (in his opinion) Luke's record of the developement of the early Church is historical, not doctrinal, and therefore has no relevance to us today. Latent in his comments was the fact that seeing Acts does not meet the criteria of *graphe* inspired by God, it should be excluded from the canon.

If this letter had come from some agnostic, it would have been evident that the opinion expressed was a personal one and based upon a distorted understanding of Christianity. The fact that it came from a man who had been a church-goer for forty-plus years shows that there is something radically wrong with the teaching-preaching in many of our churches. It also bears out the truth of Daniel Webster's comment:

If religious books are not widely circulated among the

our churches. It also bears out the truth of Daniel Webster's comment:

> If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in thes country, I do not know what is going to

our churches. It also bears out the truth of Daniel Webster's comment:

> If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and His Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will; if the power of the Gospel is not felt throughout the length and breadth of the land, anarchy and misrule, degradation and misery, corruption and darkness, will reign without mitigation or end.

Only through the reading of wholesome books on the part of pastors as well as parishoners can such ignorance be dispelled!

Commentaries on different portions of God's Word vary in value as well as purpose. Some are exegetical and explain the nuances of the original text; others are expository and, while building upon exegesis, elucidate the theme of the biblical writer. Still others, drawing upon a thorough knowledge of the writer's purpose, apply the truth to the life of the reader. In reality, all three kinds of works are necessary, but the last (if done well) is more demanding than all the others. It is also more rewarding to read.

It is into this third category that C. J. Vaughan's work falls. It corrects the misconception that the Book of Acts is purely historical document and shows that it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God (i.e. every believer in Christ) may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Originally published in 3 volumes in 1864 under the title *The Church of the First Days,* this competent handling of the theme of Acts earned the praise of Charles Haddon Spurgeon who, in his *Commenting and Commentaries,* wrote:

> *Not only does Dr. Vaughan expound his text in the ablest manner, but he introduces passages of Scripture so aptly that he suggests discourses. Bating his Christianity, we cannot too highly commend him.*

Charles John Vaughan (1818-1897), a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge (M.A., D.D.), was successively an educator, preacher, and church administrator.

Having been reared in the established church in England, Dr. Vaughan was widely known for the forcefulness of his personality and devout Christian character. He maintained a happy balance of grace and truth in his dealings with small and great (cf., John 1:17). He was not so gracious that he compromised the truth, nor was he so committed to the truth that he was devoid of grace. And his associates respected him, even if they did not always agree with him.

At one time Dr. Vaughan was offered the bishopric of Rochester--a position which carried with it considerable prestige. Initially he accepted the office. Then, following two days of heart-searching in which he realized that personal ambition had motivated his acceptance, he withdrew his consent and never again allowed personal advancement to stand in the way of doing those tasks that brought glory to God.

In meeting people's needs, Dr. Vaughan possessed an instinctive understanding of human nature and also had the power of appealing directly to their hearts. This made him one of the most effective communicators of his day. These abilities are all to be found in this present study which can be read or studied with great profit by preachers and laypeople in the church today. We are glad that it is available once more.

—Cyril J. Barber
Author, *The Minister's Library*

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THESE Lectures, like those formerly published on the Epistle to the Philippians and the Revelation of St John, were delivered in the Parish Church of Doncaster, in the ordinary course of parochial ministration. They are, however, somewhat different in their aim, and are published accordingly in a cheaper and more popular form.

The whole course consisted of fifty-six Lectures, of which the first was delivered on the 1st of June, 1862, and the last on the 28th of February, 1864.

They are published as they were delivered, with the omission of a few paragraphs, of merely local or passing interest.

It is needless to say, what will be obvious at a glance, that they are designed for ordinary readers, and aim only at awakening an intelligent interest in a particular Book of Scripture, and showing how it may be made subservient to purposes of instruction in godliness.

The work will be completed in three Volumes, under the several titles of *The Church of Jerusalem, The Church of the Gentiles, The Church of the World.* The first extends from

the 1st to the 8th Chapter (inclusive) of the Acts of the Apostles; the second from the 9th to the middle of the 17th; the third from the middle of the 17th to the end of the 28th. It will be seen that the titles are (of necessity) not accurately but only approximately appropriate.

There is no attempt at uniformity in the treatment of the several parts. In some instances a single verse has furnished the topic of an entire Lecture: in others a whole Chapter (or even more than one) has been embraced in a comprehensive survey. The interests of a Congregation had to be considered, rather than the completeness of a subsequent publication.

Where the Authorized Version has been departed from (as has been the case, more particularly, in the first two Volumes), the translation has been generally made from the 2nd Edition of Tischendorf's Greek Testament (Leipzig, 1849).

In all matters of a topographical or historical nature, reference has been freely made to such works as were readily accessible; amongst which it is needless to particularize Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of St Paul.*

DONCASTER,
September 30, 1864.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

THE present Edition of this little work differs from the three or four Editions preceding it, first by the three Volumes being now collected into one, and secondly by a careful revision of the readings and renderings of the original text. These are now harmonized with those of the Revised Version of the New Testament, except where the exercise of a thoughtful judgment seemed to require a deviation.

It has been stated again and again in Prefaces to like publications by the same Author, that he offers such translations of the Greek Testament not at all as a rival Version to that of the Authorized or even of the Revised English Bible, but simply as an attempt (by no means in his own judgment always successful) to photograph the beautiful original for the inspection of persons ignorant of it and yet keenly inquisitive about it. There are those to whom the very baldness and strangeness of the dress in which they thus see it presented have suggested reflexions which a smoother and easier flow would have precluded.

With this needful apology the entire work is again offered to any in whose way it may fall, as one of several memorials of a nine years' Ministry in one of the kindest and most affectionate of the towns of northern England, and at the same time as a contribution, however humble and unworthy, to the intelligent and practical study of the treasures of Inspired Scripture.

LLANDAFF,
September 23, 1890.

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I.

THE CHURCH OF JERUSALEM.

LECTURE I.

THE ASCENSION.

ACTS I. 9—11.

And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.

WE have three narratives of the Ascension of our Lord, each of which presents it in a somewhat different application. In that record of it which closes St Mark's Gospel, the aspect of *faith* is predominant. It sets before Christian people, in their life of faithful labour, the form of Him who, though now out of sight, is still and evermore *working with them*, and *confirming His word*, both of promise and of precept, *by signs following*. They are not alone. The eye of faith can pierce the veil which hangs between, and show them, for their quickening, for their encouragement, and for their comfort, Jesus Christ Himself standing for them at the right hand of God. A second record, that of St Luke at the close of his Gospel, presents to us the Ascension in its aspect of

love; sets before Christian men and women, in their hours of loneliness or of depression, the form of Him, who, when He left this world, left it with hands uplifted in blessing; of Him who, though now out of sight, is *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever;* the same in His tenderness towards human weakness, the same in His compassionate mercy towards sinful men. They *have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of their infirmities*, but One who, having Himself on earth *suffered being tempted*, is able in the fulness of that human experience, no less than in the fulness of His Divine strength, to relieve and *to succour them that are tempted.*

In considering that revelation which is here presented to us of the same glorious event, we shall have to regard it in yet a third aspect; the aspect of *hope.*

As St Luke's Gospel closed with the narrative of the Ascension, so his second work, the book of the Acts of the Apostles, opens with a fuller description of the same event. The Ascension was not more naturally the close of the Gospel than it was the beginning of the history of the Church. It was the turning-point between the earthly and the heavenly work of Christ. It was that event which, while it withdrew Him from personal work below, introduced Him into that life above, in the power of which He works (in part at least) through others; works through the instrumentality of changed hearts, earnest words, and exemplary lives. The Ascension was the last event in the ministry of Christ: and the Ascension was the first event in the ministry of His Apostles.

We will run through the opening words of this instructive and beautiful Church History, that we may see what place the Ascension ought to occupy in our teaching and in our thoughts.

The first treatise I made concerning all things, O Theophilus, which Jesus began both to do and to teach. The first (or former) treatise is the Gospel according to St Luke. Theophilus is the person to whom that Gospel also is addressed by name. The subject of the Gospel is described to be *all that Jesus began both to do and to teach* (all that He *did and taught as a beginning*) until

the Ascension, as distinguished, we may suppose, from what He afterwards did and taught through the Apostles.

Until the day on which, having commanded the Apostles—through the Holy Spirit—whom He had chosen, He was received up. This was the limit of the Gospel narrative; the day on which He was received up, after having, in the fulness of the Divine Spirit, given His latest charges to the Apostles whom He had chosen.

To whom He also presented Himself alive after He had suffered, after death, *in many demonstrative proofs;* by many tokens of His restored life, which admitted of no doubt or uncertainty; *through (during) forty days* from time to time *appearing to them, and speaking the things which concern the kingdom of God.* He was not living with them during these forty days; but from time to time He presented Himself to them, both in proof of His resurrection, and for the purpose of explaining to them, as they were able to bear it, the truth of God which was to be the subject of their testimony to others.

And assembling with them, joining their company when they were gathered together, *He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father,* the fulfilment of that great promise, *which,* He said, *ye heard from me: for John baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized in (with) the Holy Spirit not many days hence.*

They then, the Apostles, *having come together, asked Him, saying, Lord, is it at this time that thou restorest,* purposest to restore, *the kingdom to Israel?* Is the fulfilment of the promise of the Holy Spirit to coincide in time with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel? Their minds were still running upon an earthly kingdom, in which the Jewish people, under a conquering Messiah, should be the chief and head of the nations. Our Lord does not stay to correct these notions, which would soon be set right for ever by the promised illumination of the Holy Spirit: He only answers the question of time.

And He said to them, It is not yours, it belongs not to you, *to know times or seasons which the Father placed,* once for all, *in His own authority.* Taking their question in its most general form,

as an enquiry into the time of the end, He reminds them that *of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the Angels of heaven, but the Father only.* And He then directs their attention to that which is a matter of practical duty.

But ye shall receive power, the Holy Spirit having come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

And having said these things, He was raised (*lifted*) *up* from the earth; *and a cloud received Him*—properly, came *under* and so took Him—*from their eyes.* It is the fullest and most graphic account which we possess of the Ascension. For some time He rose gradually from the earth, and in their full view: then a cloud came between, and intercepted the further sight. They saw the bodily form, just such as they had seen it so often since the Resurrection, so far as the confines of the world of sight and sense: then they lost it: but they were witnesses that thus and not otherwise did their Master quit the earth: it was not a mere disappearance, a mere vanishing out of their sight: it was not a mysterious removal, through flood or fire: and still less was it a mere ceasing to come to them, a mere inference of departure drawn from their vainly looking day after day for a repetition of His visits to them: it was a simple and a solemn going away: the Saviour Himself, in the integrity of His Person, the soul and the body, rose, while they looked on, from a certain spot of earth where He had just before stood and spoken with them, and by a gentle and a gradual motion ascended as far upwards as the eye could follow Him. Then a cloud came between, and they saw Him no more.

And as they were gazing into the heaven while He went, while He was thus journeying upwards, *then, behold, two men were standing by them,* had already unperceived taken their place beside them, *in white apparel;* the indication, as at the Resurrection, of an angelic appearance: the *men* here, as there, were Angels in human form: if an Angel, who is a spiritual being, is to manifest himself to human eyes, it must be by assuming for the time a material form.

Who also said, Men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into the heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into the heaven, shall so come in the manner in which ye beheld Him going into the heaven.

The words had their effect. *Then returned they into Jerusalem from the mount which is called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey off. And when they came in* to the city, *they went up into the upper room where were abiding* the eleven Apostles, and where *they were all with one accord persevering in prayer, together with* certain *women, and with Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His* once unbelieving but now faithful *brethren.* We must not at present dwell further upon the scenes or occupations of that memorable chamber, the cradle of the Gospel Church. For the present we are occupied with the one fact of the Ascension. And we are to regard it as a fact full of *hope.* The words of the two men, that is, of the two Angels, give it this aspect. *Why stand ye thus gazing into the heaven,* as though you had lost your all? as though henceforth your one work must be a work of memory, thinking of Him who is gone, as men think of some dear departed friend whom they shall see again no more in this world? Not thus should it be with you. You have been permitted to be eyewitnesses of His Ascension, as before of His Resurrection. Now therefore return, and discern its lessons.

And the chief of these is, that the posture of those who love Christ must henceforth be one not more of retrospect than of expectation. It is well indeed that you should treasure in your mind the thought of Him as He was on earth. To live in His wonderful works, in His perfect example, in His Divine words, is the safe and blessed privilege of the faithful. And to look up after Him into heaven, and see Him now by faith as He lives there the Mediator and the Intercessor and the High Priest of man; the Resurrection and the Life, first of the soul, and hereafter also of the body, of each one of His people; to ascend thither, in heart and mind, after Him, and with him continually to dwell; to seek and to set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; this is one great part of

the secret of the Christian life below: thus it is that men are made strong for conflict, victorious over temptation, and at last fit for heaven. But all this is a different thing from vain regret and from idle contemplation. To gaze up into heaven after One who is gone, is not the work of His Church below. Rather is it, to gaze up into heaven for One who shall come. And in those few words lies the whole of the vast difference between two states and lives; the state and the life of a true and wise and diligent, and the state and the life of a dreamy and gloomy and torpid Christian. *To wait for the Son of God from heaven* is one half of the abiding condition of him who has first *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*

But how is it, some may ask, that the Ascension fosters this hope or suggests this duty? The words of the Angels will answer that question. *This Jesus, who has now been received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye behold him go into heaven.* The spectacle of the Ascension, vouchsafed to the disciples, was intended to make real to them the thought of His return. He might have simply disappeared; merely ceased to visit them; and they might have been left to form their own conjectures what had become of Him. Perhaps even then they might have formed the right conjecture. Perhaps they might have said, The risen Lord, risen, as we have seen Him, with His body—though with a body gloriously transformed and only visible to human eyes by an act of will and of condescension—must be somewhere; must have a place and an abode and a home; and we may fairly think and speak of Him as in heaven with God. They might have remembered the words in which, while yet with them, He thus spoke of Himself in reference to the time after His departure: and thus they might have been preserved from the folly of the sons of the prophets who, in spite of Elisha's warning, sent to seek Elijah, after his glorious removal from earth, on the mountains and in the valleys of the neighbourhood from which he had arisen. But all this would have fallen far short of the conviction inspired by the actual sight of the Ascension. There would have been a mystery and a shadowiness and

an unreality about His place and His state, which might well have diminished the comfort and impaired the satisfaction of His disciples in thinking of and in communing with Him. But now they would feel that they could trace and track Him in His glory: they would perceive which way the eye should be turned which would discern Him: they would even look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that should be revealed. They who had seen Him go might expect Him to come. The sight of the Ascension contained the faith of the Advent.

Nothing can be more remarkable than the personal hope of the personal return of Christ, which cheered the first ages of the Church below. And so long as men took their religion straight from the Bible, they retained in all its freshness that living and life-giving hope. *This same Jesus, who is received up, shall so come again in like manner.* It was thus that our Lord Himself spoke of His second coming. *They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that, where I am, there ye may be also.* It was thus that the Apostles described the one hope of the Church. *The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels. He shall come to be glorified in His saints. When the chief Shepherd shall appear. At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all His saints. When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace. And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. Behold, the Lord cometh, with ten thousand of His saints. Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him. Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

It is no good sign when the language of the Holy Scriptures

is all read as an allegory. It is always a sign of the decay of faith, when men turn the plainest declarations of Scripture into parable and into metaphor. It was in the dark and cold ages of the Church, when even the wise virgins too often slumbered and slept, that this definite hope of the Bridegroom's coming was obscured and lost sight of. And was it not by a just retribution that they who refused to infer the Advent from the Ascension, came at last from denying the Advent to deny the Ascension also? How many persons, do you suppose, now believe that Christ did actually ascend? How many, at all events, have retained to this day that *beginning of their confidence* in this and other facts of the Gospel history, which was really child-like and trustful? Who has not heard, in our days, of symbolical meanings? of these things being all designed, not to teach a plain fact, but to teach a moral lesson? as if indeed a moral lesson could ever be learnt through illusion, through deception, through falsehood! And if ever the faith of the Church is brought back to its simplicity in matters of doctrine, it must be by its being brought back to its simplicity in matters of fact. Take one of the Gospel miracles by itself, and of course it is improbable. Take the Resurrection, take the Ascension, by itself, and of course it is improbable. But take each one of these in its connection; take each one of the wonderful works which Jesus did, or of the marvellous events by which He passed to His glory, in connection with the proofs He had given of His holiness, of His truth, and of His goodness, and thus (by the combination of all these things in their perfection) of His Divinity; in other words, take each of them with its context; with the other things which we know of Him, and the other things which He came to do and to teach; and we shall find it not only credible, not only receivable upon evidence, but natural also; consistent, harmonious, and to be expected: so that the most entire faith shall be the most rational, and the simplest believer the wisest, the most intelligent, and the most philosophical.

Even thus is it with the hope of which we are speaking. It might be in itself strange, and hard to be understood, that God

should design to bring this Dispensation to a close by the personal Advent of the Mediator in the character of the Judge of man. But view that purpose, that design, that counsel of God, in connection with all that has preceded; view the Judgment in the light of the Incarnation, and the Advent in the light of the Ascension; and all shall become symmetrical and of a piece. The disciples saw Him go: why should it be incredible that He should likewise come? The very cloud so often mentioned in the prophecies of the Advent had place in the record of the Ascension: *a cloud received Him out of their sight:* even so shall a cloud be the sign when they who look for Him watch His appearing. These things were written to assist our failing faith; to enable us, not only to believe God's Word that thus it shall be, but even to understand in some measure how that Word shall be accomplished. *This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.*

My brethren, what to us is the record, is the commemoration, of our Lord's Ascension? Do we know anything of its comfort? anything of the assurance that we have in heaven, living and feeling and ruling, One who knows our frame and has felt our infirmities? One who is concerned in our welfare, interested in our work, bent upon our salvation? One who for this purpose died that He might bear our sins; for this purpose ascended, that He might intercede for us with God, might minister to us the Spirit, might prepare a place for us in heaven? What know we of the support which the Ascension ought to give to failing faith and to flagging energy? If there is One, up there, who sees and knows, who observes, records, and will judge; *what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness!* how brave ought ye to be in confessing Him, how devoted in serving, how intent in watching for Him! Yes, and, if He ascended, shall He not also return? return as He went? yet not in the sight of a faithful few, but in the sight of a wondering and awe-stricken world? Then shall the wheels of the world's business be stopped, and men must find time to listen to a voice once despised. Then shall the giddy round of pleasure be arrested in its course, and careless

women, as well as ungodly men, hear themselves without further preparation summoned to a trial as of life and death. Then too shall the man who has cared betimes for his soul, and for the souls of his brethren, see the descending form, and recognize in it the Lord of his choice and the Saviour of his hope and of his love. Shall it not be said in that day—God grant that from many in this congregation, awakening from the dust of death, the cry may ascend—*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation?*

LECTURE II.

THE UPPER ROOM.

Acts i. 24.

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen.

We live in a late age. *The world has lost its youth; and the times begin to wax old.* We see this in all ways. The bloom and freshness is worn off from everything. Even within our own recollection this process has been rapidly going forward. Pleasures which would have satisfied a lifetime are now exhausted in childhood. The words of the prophet Daniel, *Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*, have received a sort of literal fulfilment in our day, with results by no means unimportant. The multiplication of knowledge, and the multiplication of movement, have been powerful agencies in that process of sophistication and of weariness which all intelligent men observe and all sober-minded men deplore.

This result is not observable in the things of time only. We see it in reference to the concerns of the soul. Divine truth has lost its freshness. Men have wrangled about it until they have worked the very life out of it. And men have received it as a sort of tradition, and professed it as a sort of propriety; a homage done to God, and a decency due to the world; until it has lost its savour of life and its healing virtue, and become, too often,

according to our Lord's expressive figure, a thing *fit neither for the land nor yet for the dunghill*, but only *to be cast out and trodden underfoot of men.* It reminds us of the expostulation of the Lord by the Prophet Ezekiel with the shepherds of that day. *Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? As for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet.* Such is the responsibility which attends the possession of Divine truth. If we do not value, use, and live by it, we are spoiling it; trampling, as it were, and fouling it; depriving it of its very life and power, for others as well as for ourselves.

Now in a state of things of which this account is no exaggeration but the true description, as all your consciences will bear me witness, how refreshing is it to look back, across the ages, to a time when the Gospel was new; bright with its original radiance, instinct with its primeval beauty! When we are wearied and discouraged by the long familiarity with a sophisticated age and a divided and harassed Church, how reviving should it be to us and how comforting to study the record of a period when our Lord's footsteps still marked the earth, and when the eyes of His people could still sometimes see Him standing at the right hand of God! To read of that first generation of the Christian Church, and to read of it in the writing of an inspired narrator, ought to be full of interest and full of improvement for us who are struggling in our day through a wilderness less bare perhaps of earthly appliances, but far less brightly illuminated with the guiding glory of the Lord.

It is in this hope that I shall ask you to dwell from time to time upon the history of the earliest Church of Christ as it is given in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles; a Book, of the neglect of which, it is said, even Chrysostom, in the fourth century, complained, and which, we may well believe, is not to any of us quite all that it might be, in point of understanding, in

point of interest, or in point of profit. May God Himself, by His Holy Spirit, so open our understandings, and so influence our hearts, that we may be the better, to the very end of life, for having pondered together this portion of His holy Word!

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles does not profess to be a complete Church History even within the limits of time to which it is confined. It partakes, in this respect, of the character of Holy Scripture everywhere. The Gospels do not give a full history of the life and words of Jesus Christ. *There are also many other things which Jesus did*, so the Evangelist St John concludes his narrative, *the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.* A sample is given; a specimen is given; enough for use, not enough for curiosity; enough to guide our steps, not enough to relieve us of a thirst for more. It is so in the case of the Book which we are about to open. It is at once full and elliptical. It gives us, here and there, a minute description; one which makes us exclaim, as we read, the man who so writes was himself an eyewitness: he speaks (like his Master) that which he knows, and testifies that he has seen. But again, in other parts, whole years are omitted, or lightly passed over, as though to remind us that the object of all Scripture is instruction not information, or else that the Word of God is no cunningly devised fable but the simple and inartistic composition of common, often of unlettered men, who thought more of revealing the Saviour than of recommending or displaying themselves. *We preach*, the very history seems to say, *not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*

The object of this Book is to furnish a justification of those last words of one of the Gospels, *They*, the Apostles, after witnessing their Lord's Ascension, *went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* What was the word? and what were the signs by which the Lord wrought with them to confirm it? These are the questions answered in this Book, for our satisfaction, admonition, and encouragement.

We have already dwelt upon the account given us in the opening of the first Chapter, of the great miracle of the Ascension of our Lord and Saviour. The Ascension is the debatable ground, so to speak—or, more correctly, the turning-point—between the Gospels and the Acts. It properly ends the one: it properly begins the other. It belongs to both. It closes the earthly life of Christ: it opens the heavenly life of His Apostles. Though they had yet to wait, after that event, for the crowning gift of the Spirit, still that event contained in itself the pledge and foretaste of the other. *It is expedient for you that I go away: for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but, if I depart, I will send Him unto you.* Till that departure, the words were still true, *The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.*

The remainder of the first Chapter describes the employments of that brief interval between the Ascension of Christ and the descent of the Spirit. This will be our present subject.

The Ascension took place on the further (or Eastern) side of the Mount of Olives. *He led them out as far as to Bethany*, is the description of the place in St Luke's Gospel. In the passage before us, *they return to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet.*

They had already a recognized meeting-place in Jerusalem. St John tells, in his narrative of the appearances after the Resurrection, of a place where the disciples were assembled, with closed doors, on the occasion of two at least of their Saviour's visits to them. And here we read of an upper room—the upper story, no doubt, of some private dwelling-house—to which the little band of disciples habitually resorted at this time as their place of safety and seclusion, of worship and communion. In the courts of the temple they still worshipped as Israelites: they had nothing to renounce there: they were Israelites still: it was *for the hope of Israel* that they still struggled and suffered: but in their upper room they met as those who not only looked for a Redeemer of Israel, but believed in their hearts that that Redeemer was come.

It was never intended that the worship of Christ's Church should be restricted to an upper room in a common house. Once

that worship had to hide itself alike from persecuting Jews and scoffing Gentiles. Now, thanks be to God, it is no disgrace to be a Christian: and when once the rich men and the great men of the earth bowed the knee to Jesus, it was right that wealth and art should employ themselves in building and decorating His sanctuaries. But the question, however obvious, must not therefore be withheld: Are we substituting, or in danger of substituting, an elaborate ritual for a spiritual service? the temple of *art and man's device* for the temple of sincerity and of the human soul? Christian worship needs no such appliances: it is right that it should have them, but it needs them not: and those appliances of costly building and delightful music may overlay—they need not do so, but they may—that true heart-deep devotion which alone Christ values or God accepts.

The number of the disciples at the time we speak of, was about a hundred and twenty. St Paul indeed tells us that that was not, at the time of the Ascension, the total sum of Christ's people. He speaks of an appearance of Christ after His resurrection to a far larger number. *After that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present*—some twenty-five years later, when he wrote from Ephesus to the Corinthians—*but some are fallen asleep.* There is no conflict between the two reckonings. The hundred and twenty are those present in Jerusalem at the time of the Ascension: the five hundred included many who had no doubt tarried still in Galilee.

Amongst these hundred and twenty, first and foremost were the eleven faithful Apostles whose names are here once again enumerated. There were also those pious women who had followed Jesus in life and ministered to Him in death. There was *Mary the mother of Jesus;* here mentioned yet once more, and for the last time, before she disappears from the page of sacred history. It was not intended that she should be placed so prominently before the eyes of the Church, as to give any sanction, however slight or imaginary, to an undue reverence for her. She was now an honoured Christian woman, and no more. Our Lord

Himself had said, that every one of His disciples might share with her His regard and His love, who faithfully did the will of His Father in heaven. Strange that such silence and such mention should have been capable of being perverted as they have been! Strange that a large part of Christendom should have paid, notwithstanding, to His human mother a reverence absolutely divine, and even allowed that reverence to outshine and to obscure, in their worship, the honour due to the Father and to the Son! She whose place is now thus distorted below was content, while Scripture still speaks, to worship amongst the hundred and twenty, one of many believing servants of her Divine and now glorified Son. *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with certain women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.* For they also, His brethren, once unbelievers and cavillers against Him, were now enrolled among His devoted people.

And what was the work of His devoted people during these remaining days of suspense? They were fulfilling their Lord's command not to depart from Jerusalem on their several missions of toil and danger, until they should *be endued with power from on high.* The interval was spent in prayer and supplication. They were practising now the new work of Christian worship. They were learning to think of their Master as unseen yet ever near. They were learning to speak to Him and to commune with Him, without sight, out of sight. Much had they to learn in learning this. Is it not one of our own chief difficulties, this speaking to the Unseen, this seeing Him who is invisible? Does it not take most of us a whole lifetime to learn to do this as we ought; undoubtingly, peacefully, profitably, successfully? Let us encourage ourselves with the thought of those whose footsteps are before us in that endeavour. They had seen Him; they had heard Him speak; they had been His friends; they tell us of Him still in their writings, what He was and what He did; for this reason above all else, that we may be able to imitate them in believing when they could no longer see, in trusting in the dark One whom they had first known and lived with in the light.

This was their employment during the ten days between Ascension and Whitsuntide. They *all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.* The time for action was not yet. They had not yet received the power from on high. Their position resembled in one respect that of the separate state. The soul dissevered from the body is resting, not acting. It is waiting to be clothed upon, before it can resume its work for God. It is waiting for that resurrection gift, that *body as it hath pleased Him*, which God by the agency of His Holy Spirit will bestow in due time upon each of the faithful. Even so were the disciples, at the time of which we here read, waiting for that gift which should qualify for action. Prayer and supplication, not yet ministry and apostleship, this was their posture and their duty.

Just one thing they could do in this interval. They could recruit their ranks, to be ready for the word of command. They could review the gap which treachery had made in their little army, and replace him who had played the traitor. And in this way they could, as it were, assure themselves by experiment that they were indeed in communion and contact with their Invisible Lord. If their Master heard and answered, when they called upon Him to fill the vacant place below, they might feel the more confident in His nearness to them, in His care, and in His love.

It was therefore on one of those ten days that St Peter rose amongst his brethren, and called them to notice the deserted seat of Judas. He told them that prophecy had not been silent upon that desertion. There was a verse in one of the inspired Psalms of David which had waited until the fall of Judas for its literal fulfilment. With the circumstances of that fall they were all familiar. That fatal field, purchased with the reward of iniquity, did not its very name recall the memory of that obstinate perfidy and of that irremediable ruin? But the same Book which predicted the breach directed also its reparation. It foretold the occupation by another of the vacated apostleship. It said, *His charge*, or *office of oversight, let another take.* What then was the condition of such an occupation? What qualification must be possessed by the new Apostle as by the eleven who remained?

He must be one of those who had accompanied Jesus on earth through the days of His ministry. From first to last he must have been a witness of His Divine life below. But for this he would lack the characteristic mark of the Apostle, as a witness, in the highest degree competent, of His resurrection. They who had been with Him throughout His earthly ministry could best tell whether the Risen and the Crucified were one. Three years and a half of intimate knowledge, of constant companionship, would suffice, as a shorter acquaintance would not, to make it impossible that there should be mistake or error as to the identity of the dead Man and the living.

The disciples heard and acted upon the counsel of St Peter. From amongst their whole number they selected two persons possessing the specified qualification; *Joseph called Barsabas, surnamed Justus, and Matthias.* And now the time was come for a direct appeal to the guidance of Him who had promised to be with them alway, to hear the petitions of even two or three persons met in His name, and who certainly would not fail them in so solemn a decision. *They prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men;* Thou who knowest what is in man, and canst alone distinguish infallibly between true faith and false profession, between the hidden grace which qualifies and the empty pretension which is valueless for Thy service; *show which one of these two men Thou didst choose,* in Thine eternal purpose, *to take the* vacant *place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, to go to his own place,* to the fit and appointed home of the ungrateful, the hypocrite, and the traitor. *And* then, after this earnest prayer for guidance, *they cast lots upon them, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

I know not that I can add anything to the direct warning and instruction conveyed in these words.

Each one of us has a place, yes, a ministry and a mission, assigned to him, in the Church of the living God. Christ has brought us near to Himself, by invitation, by instruction, by sacraments, by ordinances of worship; by talents, few or many,

assigned; by opportunities, larger or scantier, of doing God service. We exaggerate to ourselves oftentimes the differences between our advantages and those of the first disciples. If they possessed what we cannot have, in the actual sight and contact of *the Word made flesh and dwelling among them;* on the other hand, we must not forget how everything in the position and character of Jesus of Nazareth went against their preconceptions of what the Messiah would be. Little do we, when we thus judge, enter into the great fundamental difficulty, of believing a Man to be also God; of seeing in one who was manifestly like themselves in every feeling and in every infirmity of their nature, the very and eternal Lord, by whom they themselves and all things were made. Slowly and painfully must those convictions have been formed in the hearts of any of them. Even the most open-minded and the most frank-hearted of all the Apostles must have risen by slow and gradual advances from the love of the Man to the faith of the God and Man. We are spared this difficulty. We hear of Christ as our Saviour, our Divine Saviour, as soon as we hear of Him at all; and the very absence of sight, creating one impediment, removes and precludes another. If He is not near enough to be realized, at least He is not near enough to be despised.

And I say that every one of us has given to him something of the very ministry and Apostleship of Jesus. Need I tell any of you what he might do—what he must either do or refuse to do—as his Master's witness below? Can you not so live—or might you not once so have lived—as to remind people of Christ; to make them think of Him; to make them feel His power and His goodness; or else, on the other hand, to encourage them and to help them in forgetting Him? That then is your Apostleship; your ministry and mission below. If you love Christ yourself, if you live always as in His sight and hearing, then you are confessing Him before men, and calling others also to come and follow Him likewise.

And, if not—O, do we not see, before it is uttered, how false we are to Him, how faithless, how treacherous? We read in Scripture of persons who *crucify to themselves the Son of God*

afresh: are there none who betray the Son of God afresh? betray Him sometimes, like Judas, for money; for a paltry base gain which they cannot forego though they see it to be dishonest? betray Him sometimes for the sake of a vile lust, which they cannot renounce though they see it to be ruin? betray Him sometimes like Judas, with a kiss; saying, *Master, Master*, even while they bring upon Him the enemy that is to crucify Him? And then, after a life of this kind, they go, one by one, *to his own place:* alas! if the Scripture be true, it is so: and then a fresh election, as it were, is held to fill their place: the ranks of Christ's servants will not go unreplenished, by reason of our unfaithfulness: even of the stones God could raise up true children to Abraham; and if the redeemed will not praise Him as they ought, the very stones would immediately cry out. *His charge, his oversight, let another take.* God grant us grace not thus to forfeit our apostleship! Let us confess our past unfaithfulness; the thousand times, the ten thousand ways, when and in which we have been treacherous to our Master: and let us return to Him, saying, *We have sinned: heal Thou our backslidings. Declare not our place yet vacant: give us grace rather to occupy it ourselves for Thee. And at last, when we go hence and are no more seen, let it be in repentance, not in remorse: let it be, not to the home of the hardened and of the hypocrite, but to the abode of rest and peace, where Thy servants shall indeed serve Thee; where we shall see Thy face, and follow Thee at last whithersoever Thou goest.*

LECTURE III.

PENTECOST.

ACTS II. 4.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

YE shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost — such was the Saviour's parting promise—*not many days hence.* The exact day was not specified, and still less the precise nature of the gift itself. A posture of expectation has always been the posture of the true Church below. For ages and generations the expectation was that of the Messiah's coming. And no sooner did the Messiah appear in human form, than a new season of expectation set in ; the expectation of His second coming, not in the humility of *the Word made flesh*, but in the *power and great glory* of the Judge of quick and dead. Nowhere is there, and nowhere ought there to be, any such thing as mere retrospection, or mere satisfaction, on earth below. Many chief graces can only be fostered or exercised by looking forward and by looking upward. When once rest comes, entire rest, then will it be heaven, not earth. And even heaven will have, we doubt not, its expectations as well as its retrospects.

The condition of the disciples between Ascension and Pentecost was one of expectation in a double sense. They were taught

by the Angels to begin at once looking for their Lord's return. *This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.* In that respect therefore they were even then as we are now; expectants of the Advent. But there was a near return as well as one more remote. When our Lord said to them, before His Passion, *I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice*, He said so, we believe, in no less than three senses. He would see them again, within a few short days, in Resurrection, His own Resurrection. He would see them again, after whole centuries had passed away, in *their* resurrection; making good to them the expressed hope of the Psalmist, *I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness;* or of St John, *We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.* One of these two returns had already taken place. They had seen Him again. They had been able to report one to another, *We have seen the Lord. Then were the disciples glad, when* even in a short occasional visit *they thus saw the Lord* And now that this return was over, they were already beginning to look for the greater, the final one. *To wait for His Son from heaven* was henceforth one half at least of the whole duty of a Christian.

But between these two returns, the past return and the final return, there lay, in near prospect, yet one return more: a spiritual but not therefore an unreal one; nay, perhaps, of all, the most real and the most closely personal. *The world seeth me no more, but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also:* this was the kind of reunion with their Saviour for which, however little as yet understood, they were now diligently and earnestly waiting. We are to read of that great event now; God grant, not only as of an event or fact in Christian history, and in the world's history, of which the fruits remain unto this present; but also, and still more, as one full of consequences for us, one in which, more than in ought else, we are ourselves like them and one with them.

We have read how they spent that time of double suspense. *They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.* And we have read of the one act which during that interval they

were qualified to perform; that act which we have described as a recruiting of their ranks to be ready for the word of command; the supplying of the vacant place of Judas in the little army of the Apostles. And now we find them, at the dawning of the Day of Pentecost, gathered together, as their daily custom was, in one place. We are not told that they had any intimation that that day was to be to them *the* day; the day of spiritual baptism; the day of grace and apostleship; the day of spiritual ingathering into the communion and fellowship of their risen Lord. But, in the retrospect, we can see that it was a fit day.

The feast of Pentecost was one of the three great festivals of Israel; a day on which thousands were congregated at Jerusalem from all parts of the known earth. It was called Pentecost (or *the fiftieth day*) from one particular point in the celebration of the Passover; the waving of the sheaf of the first-fruits of the harvest on the morrow after the Passover-Sabbath. From that day they were to number seven complete sabbaths, *fifty days unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath;* and then arrived the feast of weeks or of Pentecost: on which occasion, as at the earlier yearly feast of the Passover, and as at the later yearly feast of Tabernacles, all the men of the nation were required to appear before the Lord at the place of His sanctuary in Jerusalem.

The feast of the Passover had already found its antitype in that solemn season at which Christ the Paschal Lamb was sacrificed for us. The feast of Tabernacles, the annual celebration of the completion of the toils of harvest and vintage, and of the national rest which followed upon the entrance into Canaan, is to find its antitype, not on earth, but in heaven, even in that rest which remains there for the people of God. The intermediate festival of Pentecost was to have its antitype in that great gift which the Chapter before us describes. The Jewish tradition marked out the feast of Pentecost as the commemoration, year by year, of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. And in this respect—though the reckoning by which it is established is less than certain in its chronology—peculiar significance would be given to the choice of the day for the giving of that new law, of the Spirit

of life, by which the commandments of God were to be written, not on tables of stone, but as it were on the tablets of a renewed and willing heart. At all events the festival of the first-fruits was now to be fulfilled in that gift which St Paul describes as *the first-fruits of the Spirit;* that is, the Holy Spirit as the first-fruits of the heavenly inheritance; as the pledge and foretaste of that eternal life which consists in the knowledge of Him, the one true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

Such was the festival which (as the first verse of the Chapter describes it) *was* now *fully come;* or rather, perhaps, *was on the point*, or *in the act, of being fulfilled;* just dawning, we may suppose, for the day to run its course. At the dawn of the Day of Pentecost, the disciples *were all with one accord in one place.* We are not told where: the words which follow might seem to indicate their customary place of meeting.

And there arose suddenly, out of heaven, a sound as of a mighty wind rushing; and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven—or rather, *distributed*, or *parting themselves among them—tongues as if of fire; and it rested*, one of these tongues rested, *upon each of them. And they*, the disciples, *were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues*, in languages different from their own, *even as the Spirit granted to them to utter. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem*—some perhaps resident there, and others having come up thither for the festival—*Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven;* Jews, for the most part, not by birth, but by religion. The list which follows shows this strong expression to be scarcely hyperbolical. *And this sound having taken place*—the *rushing mighty wind* described in the second verse—*the multitude came together, and were confounded*, thrown into astonishment and confusion, *because that every one heard them speaking in his own dialect;* not only in the language, but in the very dialect of the language, which was his own. *And they were amazed, and marvelled, saying, Behold, are not all these men who are speaking Galilæans? And how hear we, each one in our own dialect wherein we were born*—our own native tongue? And then follows an

enumeration of the various races to which they belonged. Each one had its own tongue and its own dialect: and yet, however many in number, however distant in position, however various in race, *we do hear them speak in our tongues the mighty works of God.*

The subject thus brought before us is, in every point of view, one of the most remarkable, one of the most serious, yes, one of the most solemn, which can possibly engage the mind of man. I must pause at the verse which we have reached, and would pray God to give us some portion of that gift of which we are reading, to make the fact and the doctrine impressive and salutary to the hearts here open before Him.

Two things need to be here distinguished: the origin of the gift, and the gift signified.

1. We all know how backward men are in understanding, and how stubborn men are in disputing, the existence of what we call spiritual or supernatural influences. You know how they seek to resolve everything into workings of nature, of chance, or of imagination; how they trace one thing up to enthusiasm, and another to excitement, and another to fancy, and another to a morbid condition of mind or body; and how impossible it is to elicit from some lips the hearty, serious confession, *It is the Lord:* surely the Lord is in this work or in this word; the hand of God, the will of God, the Spirit of God, and not of man only. There is no spiritual influence, however remarkable, which the philosophers of this age, nay, which the theologians of this age, would not be able to explain away, to laugh down, or to resolve by subtle argument into an operation either natural or else morbid. It is well perhaps that the Gospel itself, with its doctrine of the Saviour and its doctrine of the Spirit, was launched in the world, and established in men's convictions, in an age of greater simplicity and of less presumption.

But if in any age God would make it evident to man that He, He Himself, is at work, I know not how it can be done without that which, for want of a better term, we denominate miracle. If our Lord would convince common men that He had all the

power of God in heaven and in earth, was there any mode so really decisive as that which the Gospels describe to us; manifestations in act of His supremacy over nature, of His supremacy over man, and of His supremacy over Satan? Those who had actually seen Him still a tempest, raise a corpse, and cast out a devil, must have felt that God had given them that sort of evidence which nothing could shake of the Messiahship and of the Divinity of His Son Jesus Christ Even thus was it with the coming of the Holy Ghost. Hearts might have been influenced, lives might have been changed, the stream of habit turned backward and the chain of sin inwardly broken; and men might have ascribed all this to experience of consequences, force of character, or strength of will. If it was to be made plain, beyond further gainsaying, that the Holy Spirit of God had Himself descended to make His abode and His temple in the Church and in the hearts of men, there must be some sign, accompanying that advent, of which the senses could take cognizance, and from which no inference but one only could be drawn.

Such a sign was that marvellous power of which the passage before us gives the first example. If unlettered men—fishermen, perhaps, from the sea of Galilee—at best, men who could cast up a reckoning and calculate the lawful gains of a receipt of custom —were heard to utter sounds recognized by men of diverse nations as words and sentences of their native speech; if the audience was large enough, and various enough, and unwilling enough, to make the evidence of the fact ample and infallible; what other explanation could be given of so marvellous a phenomenon, save that which St Peter gave on the day of its manifestation, *This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh?* It was evident that they who thus spoke were overmastered, in the very organs of speech, by a presence and a power within, which was not their own, but the very presence and power of God Himself.

And is there anything irrational, except indeed to an Atheist, in the supposition that God might design to bestow upon His

creatures a direct personal communication and influence from His own holiness and from His own love; or, designing so to do, should make it plain beyond contradiction whence that communication and that influence was derived? It can be no reproach to a Revelation, that its utterance is decisive, or of a kind intelligible (as to its proofs), not only to the wise and prudent, but to the judgment of unlettered men.

In the signs which accompanied the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples, we can recognize every one of the emblems by which He had been foretold. There is the rushing mighty wind, *blowing where it listeth*, audible in its sound, inscrutable in its source and destination, by which our Lord Himself, in His earliest recorded discourse in the Gospel of St John, had sought to typify and to illustrate the Spirit's work. Again, there was the fiery flame—dividing itself amongst the individuals of that assembled throng, till it rested upon the head of every one—which had been taken from the first as the description of the Saviour's Baptism, in its various offices of illuminating, purifying, warming, cheering, enkindling, transforming, the human soul: *He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.* And once more, the wind which struck the ear, and the fire which arrested the eye, was followed by the appropriate sign of the voice which bore witness to the informing, instructing, and counselling presence within. The symbols were as appropriate as the testimony was authoritative.

2. Such was that which we have described as the sign of the gift. And now what, in itself, was the gift signified?

We read of it in its prediction, and we read of it in its experience. Look, for the one, amongst many other passages, to the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of the Gospel according to St John. Look, for the other, amongst many other passages, to the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and to the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians. Study those few chapters; and you will see how little they can enter into the fulness of the great promise, who either imagine it to have been designed for Apostles only, or conceive of it, even in them, as consisting principally of

what we term miraculous gifts. The Holy Spirit was promised as the Comforter, the Remembrancer, the Teacher, the Guide, the inward Advocate, the very Representative of Christ, the very Presence of God and of Christ, in the soul within: His coming was to make it a gain even that the Saviour should depart—so far better should it be to have the Father and the Son dwelling in a man by the Spirit, than to have even the daily comfort and happiness of the company and converse of the incarnate Son of God below. And what then was the experience of this great gift? How did they describe it, who had sought it and found it for their own? Hear, my friends, yes, read and judge for yourselves, what St Paul, who was not present on the Day of Pentecost, but only received the gift afterwards as any one of you might receive it in answer to hearty heart-deep prayer—judge for yourselves, as you read it in his own earnest words, what St Paul found the gift of the Holy Ghost to be to him. Hear him tell how the Holy Ghost within had set him free from the bondage of sin and death; how He had turned him from having his heart and affections set on things below to having them all set on things above; how he had found the Holy Spirit to be indeed a Spirit not of fear and dread, not of abject terror and instinctive shrinking from God, but the very Spirit of adoption, making him cry evermore to God as his loved and loving Father; how he had found Him powerful to help his infirmities; especially when in the endeavour to pray he had often found himself ignorant and silent, and then had perceived the Spirit making His all-powerful intercession in his behalf in those unuttered and unutterable yearnings which God recognizes and accepts as the very breathings of His own Spirit in the heirs of salvation. Is there not here just the experience, in one of its parts, of the state of each one of us? and is there not here that experience, in the other part, which each one of us needs to make him happy, to make him peaceful, and to make him strong for God?

The gift of the Holy Spirit as here set before us is indeed the very need of man. It is one half—I will not say the greater half, for there is in these matters no possibility of comparisons of

less and greater—but it is one half of the whole need of man. We need forgiveness first; the remission, the dismissal, of our past sins, by an act of Divine pardon; an act performed not because it is unnecessary, or comparatively unnecessary, but because it is needed, urgently, indispensably needed; even because we cry, *Lord, be merciful to my sin: for it is great.* That is our first need: is it yet supplied to us? Which of all this congregation has had his sins, or her sins, yet forgiven? And, alas, if not, it is because we have not asked. O folly, O madness beyond all expression, that there is forgiveness waiting for us, and we will not ask! But there is a second need behind, without which even forgiveness itself would be a mockery. There is the gift of the Holy Ghost also waiting for us; pledged to us in our Baptism; promised to us in God's Word of life; even as it is written, *Your heavenly Father will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.* You have heard what the gift is, in its illuminating, in its instructing, in its transforming, in its comforting, in its strengthening and protecting and guiding power: do not you want it? Are you wise enough, and strong enough, and happy enough, and heavenly-minded enough, fit to live and fit to die, without God's Holy Spirit? Alas, the very question mocks us. No, we are ignorant, and we are poor, and we are weak, and we are often sad, and we are always lonely in heart, unless and until God's light rises upon us; until the Sun of righteousness, which is Jesus Christ Himself, rises upon us with that healing in His wings, which is first the joy of a free forgiveness, and secondly the joy of an indwelling Spirit. Let us learn, learn for ourselves, God Himself being our Teacher, what is the support, and what is the comfort, and what is the rest, and what is the strength, which the Holy Spirit, humbly sought and waited for morning by morning, brings into the heart and soul and life of man. Never let us go forth to the occupations and the temptations of any one day, till we have brought our empty vessel to be filled at that well of salvation. Never let us start on our day's journey, never let us begin our day's trivial round of duty, never let us enter the ranks of our day's outward and inward conflict,

until we have humbly and earnestly asked of God the supply of His Spirit's strength and the sweet comfort of His Spirit's presence. Be we well assured that, if we are filled with the Holy Ghost, as it is our Christian privilege and promise to be, the other words of the text will not be unrealized in us; we shall also speak with another tongue, the Spirit giving us the utterance. How transforming even now, even in these days, is the influence of the Holy Spirit upon human lips! Can we live with a man in whom God dwells, and not perceive it in his words? Is the Divine promise withdrawn or falsified, *These signs shall follow them that believe...they shall speak with new tongues?* Let us all pray, much and fervently, for the spiritual gift of that new, that Divine speech, in the power of which he who once opened his lips only to trifle, to defame, or to deceive, has begun to breathe the sounds of love and joy and peace, of gentleness and goodness and faith and meekness. Thus shall men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. Thus shall we bear that testimony, not of word only but of sign, by which minds are convinced and hearts opened, by which God's name is made known on earth, His saving health among all nations.

LECTURE IV.

THE FIRST SERMON.

Acts ii. 37.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is based upon fact, and prompts to action. It is not a system of doctrines, and it is not a code of laws, and still less is it a fabric of fancies or theories: it is a record of facts; a narrative, established by adequate testimony, of certain things done and suffered by real persons upon the surface of this real and solid earth. The Gospel tells of things done; not imagined, not thought, not designed only or purposed, not said only or talked of, but done, actually done; and whatever else the Gospel contains flows out of this source, as naturally, as necessarily, as a stream of water out of its spring and fountain-head. It is this characteristic of the Gospel which makes it at once so satisfactory, and so universal. We can plant the sole of the foot firmly upon it, and it will not fail us or fall away, *for it is founded upon a rock;* and that rock is the rock of fact: we believe, because something was done: nay, we believe that something was done, and all else is the result of that belief. Therefore it is that the Gospel is universal in its application: not the

religion of a few philosophers, capable of arguing out deep truths or of rising to lofty mysteries, but the religion of a world, as suitable to the simple as to the learned, to the man of plain common sense as to the man of intellect and of genius. We have cause to praise God, every one of us, for the stability which He has thus given to His revelation, by making truth rest upon fact, and right doctrine upon certain evidence.

And as the Gospel rests upon fact, so also it prompts to action. No sooner is the persecutor of the Church struck to the earth by the bright light of the Divine presence in heaven than we hear him asking, *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?* And no sooner does the jailer at Philippi recognize in his prisoners the servants and the apostles of the Most High God, than he falls down before them with the practical question, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* And no sooner does the astonished multitude hear from Peter's lips on the Day of Pentecost the explanation of the marvellous sign which has gathered them to listen—how that it was the natural result of the Resurrection and Ascension of the Man Christ Jesus—than they exclaim, in the first workings of that new conviction, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* What they heard was a narrative of facts: what they understood by it was a summons to action.

God grant to us also, my brethren, as we listen this evening, something of a like spirit; a spirit of faith in Gospel fact, a spirit of readiness for Gospel action.

The strange portent of which we last spoke—unlearned and ignorant men speaking in divers languages the wonderful works of God—produced various results in those who witnessed it. All were amazed: all were in doubt, saying one to another, *What can this mean?* but upon some the impression wrought by the scene was an impression of serious awe; while others perversely ascribed the strange sounds which were in their ears to the exciting influence of excess and intoxication. *Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*

Such was the motley multitude to which St Peter now rose to address his first Sermon. In our days a Sermon is commonly the

explanation, enforcement, and application, of some particular text of Scripture or topic of doctrine: it is thus that we endeavour to arouse the interest or stir the activity of a congregation supposed to believe. But our Sermons would be none the worse for a close adherence in some respects to the Apostolical models given us in this Book. Let us more and more repeat to ourselves, in making preparation for the discharge, on each occasion, of our office of public preaching, the two words, *Fact* and *Action:* the Gospel no cunningly devised fable, but a record of true deeds and true sufferings by a real Person; the Gospel no mere sound of a pleasant voice, no mere performance by one who can play well on an instrument, but rather a trumpet-call to action; the summons of real men and women, short lived yet immortal, to a certain course of conduct, to a certain manner of life, having this one plain characteristic, that *it will bring them peace at the last.*

St Peter, after a brief call to attention, and an indignant refutation of the charge of drunkenness by a reference to the hour of the day, the third only from sunrise, himself sets us the example of reading or repeating a text for his Sermon. The Bible then was the Old Testament. Out of it Christian teachers were able to plead for God and to prove the Gospel. It was of the volume of the Old Testament Scriptures that St Paul spoke, when he said, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* And again, *From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* In our thankfulness for the New Testament we must never learn to despise the Old.

St Peter's text on this occasion was taken from the Prophet Joel. That Book of Holy Scripture was probably composed as early as 850 years before the birth of Christ. Even in those ancient times the Prophet was instructed to foretell a coming age—described in the general terms, *It shall come to pass afterward,* or, as St Peter here quotes it, *in the last days*—when God should *pour forth His Spirit,* or *of His Spirit,* that is, a portion or effluence of His own Holy Spirit, *upon all flesh:* no longer upon

a few favoured men, one in a generation, entrusted with a special mission of rebuke or encouragement to their countrymen; but upon His people generally, without distinction of sex or age or rank; upon sons and daughters, upon young men and old, yea, upon the very servants and handmaidens; so that God's communications should be, with all His true people, direct, immediate, and personal, not passing through any human medium, but conveyed to the very soul within by the agency of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. That was the promise. And with it is coupled, in the three following verses, the prophecy of the coming of the last day. *The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.*

We have often occasion to notice that the Prophets of the Old Testament were not instructed to reveal the long interval which should elapse between the two Advents of the Saviour. They often speak as though the coming in glory were the only coming; or as though the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom would result at once from His first manifestation. The delay of the second coming was not even a revelation of the Gospel. Each age was to expect it. The taunt, *Where is the promise of His coming?* was to have scope to operate, because no generation was to be made aware that the Advent might not take place within its duration. And thus it is that the Prophet Joel here speaks of the outpouring of the Spirit as a sign of the last days. The Gospel age, however long it has continued or may continue still, is the dispensation of the last times: after it comes none other, and itself is to be viewed as one whole, from the redemption which contained in itself not the promise only but the germ of all, until the coming of the very kingdom of heaven in power and great glory. *In the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit...And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath...before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

After this quotation the discourse addresses itself pointedly

to the audience. *Ye men of Israel, hear these words.* A man, as you deemed Him, and as (in one part of His nature) He was, has within these few weeks been put by you—by your nation, and by some (it may be) even of those who listen—to a cruel and shameful death. You as a nation, some of you as individuals, seized upon that Man, and *by the hand of lawless* (*Gentile*) *men slew Him by crucifixion.* And yet that Man had God's mark upon Him. He was *approved of God unto you,* attested and demonstrated by God in the face of the nation and of the individuals of the nation, *by miracles* (*powers*) *and wonders and signs, which God wrought by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.* He could not have done the works He did, if God had not been with Him. And ye are His witnesses: you know that the things which I say of Him are true. And yet you have been His murderers. The blood of that Man, whom God attested before you as His messenger and His minister; the blood of that Man is at this moment upon your hands.

But was then that murder effectual? Did that cruel and shameful death end that sacred life? No, *God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it;* mastered permanently and finally by death. Not possible, by reason of His Divine nature. Not possible, for this further reason also, that the voice of inspired Prophecy had declared the contrary. It was of Him that David spake, when he said in the 16th Psalm, *I foresaw* (*saw in front*) *the Lord* (*Jehovah*) *always before my face,* as my Guide and Hope; *for He is on my right hand,* as my Protector also, *that I may not be moved,* shaken from my standing, by any violence: and then follow the significant words: *therefore,* in this confidence, *my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest* (*tabernacle*) *in hope; because Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell* (*Hades*), *neither wilt Thou give Thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou didst make known to me paths of life; Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.* Could words like these have found their full accomplishment in their human author? Could David say of himself, with literal truth, that God would not allow his

soul to remain in the place of the departed, or his body in the tomb to see corruption? David died and was buried, and to this day you may visit the tomb in which his mouldering body awaits the resurrection of the just. The words which David thus spake, he spake as God's prophet. He knew that the promised Saviour should be of his house and lineage; and it was of Him, of that Saviour, that he there wrote in the Spirit. For himself the words could only express that assurance of a life beyond death, which is the hope of the saints. But in relation to Christ the words have a further and a fuller meaning. *He* was not suffered to remain long enough in the grave, even to see decomposition or corruption. *His* soul was recalled from its brief sojourn in Hades, before it had taken up its abode there as a recognized inmate. Of this revival from death, of this return in soul and body from Hades and from the grave, we His Apostles are the witnesses. We have seen Him risen. We have received Him, we have conversed, we have eaten with Him, since He rose from the dead. *This Jesus God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

Now therefore the event of this day becomes intelligible and natural. The risen Saviour hath fulfilled His promise. He promised to send—He hath sent—His Holy Spirit upon His disciples. *Exalted by the right hand*, by the exerted and manifested power, *of God* Himself; restored to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; He hath but received of the Father the promised Holy Spirit for His disciples, and these wonderful gifts which ye see and hear are but the expressions and indications of that Spirit's presence.

And hereunto agree those other words of the Psalmist, *The Lord* (*Jehovah*) *said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand*, in the place of glory and power, *until I have made Thy foes Thy footstool.* That prophecy, like the former, points, not to David himself, but to David's Son; even to Him who is as truly the Lord of David in right of His Godhead, as He is the Son of David by reason of His manhood.

Let therefore every family of Israel know assuredly that God made Him, by this one act of recognition, in resurrection and

ascension, *both Lord and Christ—even this Jesus whom ye crucified.*

Such was the discourse, to which a blessing was vouchsafed such as has been granted to no other. Many a more eloquent sermon has been preached since that day; many a sermon as true in its facts and as cogent in its reasoning. But probably no other sermon, through eighteen centuries, has ever been the means of converting three thousand souls. God works where and as and by whom He will; *choosing* oftentimes *the weak things of the world to confound the mighty*, and the illiterate and ignorant and humble to move the hearts, or else to put down the arrogance, of the wise and prudent and noble. We may read St Peter's words unmoved: we have done so many times, and found them but a dead letter: we may even have thought how far more powerfully he might have pleaded his cause, or arranged the materials at his command. But not so did they to whom he addressed himself. *When they heard, they were pricked in their heart.* Compunction was the first fruit of his preaching. They had crucified the Lord of glory. The Messiah had come to His own, and they had refused Him. As a nation, they had despised and rejected Him; as individuals, they were to this moment impenitent and unbelieving. Conscience now awoke. The sign which was before them was a sign of power: how could this be, save by the hand of God? But beyond this, it was a sign foretold by Jesus; by One who in His lifetime had spoken to them the words, and wrought among them the very works, of God. All things had come to pass, even as He had said to them. And here before them, in all boldness, in all the confidence of truth, and in all the power of inspiration, stand these twelve men declaring themselves to be witnesses of His resurrection. And their own Holy Scriptures, quoted largely and decisively in their hearing, correspond in every point with this fulfilment. David foretells death and resurrection, ascension and glory: Joel foretells the outpouring of the Spirit:—yes, all is now clear and consistent, though the inference is one of shame and condemnation for themselves.

When they heard, they were pricked in their heart, and said

unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and *brethren, what must we do?* If this be our condition; if we are the betrayers and murderers of the Lord of glory; what can we do to repair this ruin, to make amends for this sin?

We will not answer the question at this time: rather let it press upon us as a question; as a matter of personal anxiety, as well as of deep moment, for ourselves. And let us not separate until we have pondered, in a few last words, the two salient points of the text itself; compunction, and anxiety; conviction of sin, and enquiry after duty.

1. Hearing of Christ caused compunction. What they heard of Him was extremely simple. It was nothing more than what we have all heard ten thousand times; just the story of His death, not at all dwelt upon in harrowing detail; just the fact that He was crucified, and just the fact that He afterwards rose and ascended. In them was fulfilled the words written of old by the Prophet Zechariah, *I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn.* They had pierced Him; by the help of Gentile hands, to which they could not wholly nor chiefly transfer the guilt of that sin; they had pierced Him, and now the arrow of conviction pierced them. *They were pricked in the heart.*

I know not that any words of man could bring to our minds the same conviction of sin against the Saviour. Certainly no words could bring that conviction to our hearts, without the grace of God by His Holy Spirit. And yet we do read of such a crime as that of *crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame.* The Epistle to the Hebrews contains such a sentence; and even says of such persons that *it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.* God grant therefore that, in its worst form, that of actual apostasy, I suppose, from Christ, that of openly blaspheming the holy name, of renouncing altogether the very profession of His service, none of us may yet have committed it. But there are approaches to that crime. There are those who make very light of the purposes for which

Christ died. There are those who contradict and go against the very object of that death; that He might *put away sin; that He might redeem us from all iniquity.* Is there no one here who ever committed sin with another person; helped, in other words, to undo Christ's dying work in another person's soul? And is there no one here who ever tempted another person to commit sin; either by ridiculing his scruples, or by making the way to sin known to him, or by suggesting to his mind sinful images, or raising in his mind sinful desires? That man, whoever he is, has done worse things than even the Jews who gave Jesus to be crucified. Nothing, however cruel, done to the body, can be so heinous as the least injury done to the soul. Alas! there are those now amongst us, we cannot doubt it, who have more cause to be *pricked in their heart* when they hear of Jesus, than ever had those men to whom St Peter preached on the day of Pentecost.

And if not in this gravest and worst sense, yet tell me, men and brethren, which of you has not cause to be ashamed and sorrowful when he thinks of his Lord and his God? What is a day to you –any day, the best of your days, this holy day, this Lord's Day, if you will—but one succession of slights done to your Saviour? How did it begin? Did your heart rise to Him with the first dawn as to your heart's daystar, as to the very Sun of your soul? Had you not much ado to drag yourself to Him at all? Was not your morning prayer a poor, cold, reluctant service; full of wandering, or else hurried and perfunctory; a duty done, instead of a desire fulfilled, a longing satisfied? And so the day went—yes, I know it too well—full of anything and everything rather than the thought and the love of Christ; full of the world, full of vanity, full of self; only not full of gratitude and praise, not full of devotion and love, not full of heavenward aspiration and of humble hope. Then have not you, have not we all, cause to feel compunction? Is there indeed any thought more condemning to us than that of the dying love of Christ, or any posture more desirable to us, when that thought at last comes, than that of the self-abasing penitent, who cries, afar off, in the distant sight of the cross, *God be merciful to me a sinner?*

2. And this compunction may well work in us anxiety; the conviction of sin the desire for direction. *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* It is the want of this desire which makes our meetings for worship too often cold and lifeless. What would preaching be, if it were in deed and in truth addressed to a number of human hearts, every one of which was inwardly asking, *What must I do?* Preaching, in so far as it is God's ordinance, in so far as it is the work of a true minister, is a finger-post marking the traveller's way, and saying to wayfaring men, as they successively come up to it in life's weary pilgrimage, *This is the way; walk ye in it.* Let us come together, Sunday by Sunday, in this spirit; crying, in heart, to the ministers of Christ's Gospel, *Men and brethren, what shall I do?* and doubt not but your cry will be heard: if man should fail you, God Himself will be your Preacher; your inward ear shall hear the voice of His Spirit, warning, counselling, directing, comforting, according to your need, according to His insight into your condition. Come in that spirit, *and verily thou shalt be fed. As the rain cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

LECTURE V.

CHURCH LIFE.

Acts ii. 42.

And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Our last text was a question. A vast congregation had listened to St Peter's discourse explaining the mystery of that great day of Pentecost. He had represented it as the most natural thing in the world that the risen and glorified Saviour should keep His word, should fulfil His express promise, by thus baptizing His disciples with the Holy Ghost. They knew from their own Scriptures that an outpouring of the Divine Spirit was to be a sign of the latter age, the age of the Messiah and of the Gospel. They knew from their own observation by what tokens the Messiahship of Jesus had been attested; they knew also how He had been received by His own to whom He came. Thus far the whole population were His witnesses. From that point the evidence was less promiscuous, but not less really conclusive. It had not been given to all the people to see Him after His resurrection. It is not God's method to overwhelm with demonstrations those who have refused the light given. To those who best knew Him; to those who had accompanied Him through His ministry; to witnesses, in short, the most competent, and of

ample number; to these, but not to the thoughtless and unbelieving multitude, *God, having raised up His Son Jesus, showed Him openly.* The rest, who had Moses and the Prophets and would not hear them; who had seen what Jesus was, and would not hearken to Him; it was not to be granted that they should *see One rise from the dead*, whom, even so rising, they would have found excuses still for discrediting. Testimony, evidence, witnesses; an appeal to the understanding, the conscience, and the will; not constraint, not compulsion, not a flash of blinding light, or an intuition of irresistible proof; this was God's order with men who had set aside the calm influences of words such as never man spake, and of works such as no man could do except God were with Him. These witnesses were now before them. Their testimony begins to-day; the testimony of plain unlettered men, saying, *We saw Him die, and we have seen Him risen.* Your own royal Psalmist spoke of such a marvel; of One recalled from Hades before His flesh could even see corruption; of One whom he calls his Lord set at the right hand of God in heaven. That prophecy was now accomplished. *God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

The effect of this address was instant and decisive. Multitudes were *pricked in the heart* with a godly sorrow, and began to ask in earnest, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* And now we are to trace that work of conviction and conversion into its consequences. We are to see what primitive doctrine, and what primitive practice was; by what means men were gathered into Christ's fold, and how they went in and out there and found pasture.

St Peter's answer to the question last considered was short but full. He said to them, *Repent;* change your minds towards Christ, and towards God, towards sin and duty; deplore and renounce the past, form new resolutions, cherish new feelings and new motives: *and let each one of you be baptized on* the strength of *the name of Jesus Christ;* that is, believing in the revelation of Jesus Christ as that which He truly is in Person and work, in office and will: *unto remission* (*dismissal*) *of sins; and ye shall*

receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. There is an outward ordinance to be submitted to, the ordinance of Baptism, as the connecting link between the individual soul and its redemption.

But that ordinance has two conditions; two features of mind which (in the case of an adult) must be formed before Baptism; repentance, and faith. First, you must change your mind as to your sins; regret, renounce, forsake them: and secondly, you must believe that Jesus Christ is the only and all-sufficient Saviour of sinners. The former condition is here expressed: the latter is implied in the words *in the name of Jesus Christ:* he who would come to Baptism must believe that Christ is, and is that He is. On these two conditions hang the benefits of Christian Baptism. If by the nature of the case, as in the instance of Infant Baptism, these two conditions cannot be made good before Baptism, they must be made good after Baptism; and then Baptism will not require to be repeated, but only as it were to be rehearsed, appropriated, and made your own.

Again, as there are two conditions attached to right Baptism, those of repentance and faith, so also there are two promises annexed to it: first, the remission or dismissal of sins; God so putting away our sins that He remembers them against us no more: and secondly, the gift of the Holy Ghost; that inward presence of the Holy Spirit of God, which is the blessing of the Gospel dispensation; as it is said, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*

On this rock, my brethren, of condition and of promise, the holy Church of Christ was founded below. Let me add two remarks upon this elementary doctrine.

(1) Never seek to be wise above what is written, so as to dispense with ordinances. Through Baptism men passed into the Church on the great day of Pentecost, when, if ever, it might have been dispensed with in the face of so marvellous an interposition of Divine grace. Through Baptism men pass into the Church still, and *holy and humble men of heart* are contented to have it so.

(2) Next, when we speak of conditions, do not imagine that you are first to satisfy these, and then to come to God as it were with the price of acceptance in your hand. These conditions are as much made yours by God's grace alone, as the promises which follow upon them. You must as much ask God for that first gift of His Spirit, by which alone you can be made to repent and to believe, as for that later and more glorious gift, by which you possess God Himself to dwell in you through Christ by the Spirit as the very Life of your life and Soul of your soul.

Then follows a very encouraging assurance as to the largeness and amplitude of God's promise. *For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call to Him.* Wherever the sound of the Gospel penetrates, there goes with it the call of God. He calls all men everywhere to Him; calls them to Him as to a forgiving Father and a long-suffering Saviour and Redeemer. Place no limitations, my brethren, for yourselves or for others, where God has made none. You will want all the freeness of the Gospel offer before you have done with it. You will find in yourself a depth of defilement which will need all the amplitude of the Divine mercy to keep you from despair. And depend upon it, the only Gospel which has a charm in it for human wretchedness and human degradation around, is a Gospel as open, as expansive, and as unrestricted, as the range of Creation, as the domain of the Omnipotent.

The words here written were but a part of the whole discourse of the Apostle on this day of wonders. *With many other words did he protest to them and exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.* The exact expression is, *Be saved from this crooked generation.* Submit to be rescued. Let the salvation of God reach you. You are not called to rescue yourselves; you are not called to devise a plan of salvation, or to work out a plan of salvation, for yourselves: you have but to accept, to welcome, to submit to God's healing and saving hand: let Him work: only resist not, only evade not, that outstretched arm of love. Remember, there is danger, there is ruin, in remaining as you are:

the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sin: you are a sinner; you need salvation: but God has found a ransom; God has found a Saviour: look to Him, *while it is called To-day*, and be saved.

They then that accepted His word were baptized: and on that day there were added about three thousand souls.

It is fairly argued from this passage that Baptism by sprinkling was not unknown to the first days of the Church. The supply of water in Jerusalem would have been insufficient for the performance, on one day, of three thousand baptisms by immersion: that mode of administering the rite is more significant in its emblem of the spiritual death and burial, and of the Christian's rising again to newness of life; and our own Church permits and authorizes its use: but it is not the quantity of water, we may well believe, which constitutes this Sacrament, any more than it is the quantity of bread or of wine which is of importance in the other.

Now we must not exaggerate to ourselves the condition in which these three thousand persons were at once placed as saints and servants of God. There was then indeed no temptation to a false profession. To be a Christian was not then, as it is now, the passport to respect and honour: it led to nothing then save astonishment, exclusion, reproach, contempt. We may well hope therefore that every one of those three thousand persons was a true convert. But how much must they have had to learn and to unlearn, changed as they had been in one hour from Jews to Christians, from faithless to believing. And yet can we not almost envy now that great, that sudden change? What must it have been to hear the Gospel for the first time; to have it all clean and fresh and fragrant, still moist with the very dew of heaven, still unsoiled and unspoiled by the smoke and by the mire of earth?

Now the text tells us how these persons lived, in that first bloom and freshness of the Gospel. *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine;* or rather, *they gave themselves perseveringly to the Apostles' teaching; and to fellowship* one with another; *to the*

breaking of the bread, and to prayers. Here are four particulars enumerated.

(1) *They waited constantly upon the teaching of the Apostles.* There was much for them to learn. They knew nothing as yet in detail of the doctrine of their new Master. The particulars of His life; the words of warning and precept, of counsel and encouragement, which He uttered; the spiritual insight given in His discourses into the Law of God and into the Scriptures of the Old Testament; the precious maxims of life and conversation which fell from His lips in hours of comparative privacy when He expounded to His disciples things spoken in parables to the multitude; still more, the various items of that perfect example; His meekness under provocation, His wisdom in answering cavils, His patience in removing difficulties, His abhorrence of deceit and guile, His tenderness towards the conscience-stricken and repentant; above all, the incidents of that last week, of that last night of all, now brought back to their remembrance by the Holy Spirit, with many sharp pangs of sorrow for the share they themselves had borne in adding to His sufferings; and then the reminiscences of visits paid to them again and again after the Resurrection, when He was explaining the secrets of His kingdom and fitting them to be His messengers and ministers in the world; how must the Apostles have busied themselves in recalling and recounting these things to a congregation all but wholly ignorant of them. How must they have told and told again, amidst breathless silence or murmured satisfaction, words and deeds recorded now and unrecorded in the Gospels; some *written that we might believe*, others untold still, because, *if written every one, the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.* It was one part of the last charge to the Apostles that they should baptize in their Saviour's name; that is, in that sacred name of the Divine Trinity, which is all summed up in Christ. It was another part of that last charge, that they should teach the new disciples to *observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them:* and it was this which remained to be done by patient and repeated ministrations to those who for this purpose waited constantly on their teaching.

My brethren, we are too ready to imagine that we have nothing to learn now from public teaching. We sit in judgment upon our teachers, as though we had all truth and all knowledge already in possession. And most unwilling would your ministers be to speak as though they had secrets to tell you from this place; anything which you know not, or might not know, for yourselves, from the pages of our holy Book. Nevertheless we do believe that preaching is one of God's ordinances, and that to it (in its place) belongs the emphasis of that solemn caution of St Paul, *Despise not prophesyings*. It is still, we believe, one mark of the true Christian, as it was in the days of old, that he *waits stedfastly upon doctrine;* upon the teaching of appointed men, whose responsible office it is *rightly to divide* to the congregation *the word of truth.*

(2) In the second place it is said that *they persevered in fellowship* or *communion;* that is, in the formation and fostering of that brotherly spirit of Christian love, which is described for us in the Apostles' Creed as *the Communion of Saints.* It was a thing to which they applied themselves, with all the energy of a new affection, this habit of fellowship or of communion. The three thousand converts of the Day of Pentecost did not separate after their Baptism, each to his home, to live a life of pious meditation in the seclusion of their own hearts with God. They set themselves resolutely to a life of fellowship. We shall hear presently some of the workings of that life: but, for the moment, take it thus: The Christian is one of a community: alone, he is but a limb cut off from the trunk: separately he must draw his vital vigour from the Head, but that vigour must be used and manifested, not in isolation, but in a self-forgetting fellowship. He must never fancy himself the whole body; either in being independent of the Head from which he derives vitality, or in being independent of the organized system in which he exercises but one function of duty. That is the second mark of a Christian. He attends perseveringly to fellowship.

I ask not how, but I would ask whether, the thought of Christian communion has its place with us. Do we cherish in

every possible way the feeling of membership in a body? Is there anything that we do as Christians, in which we have regard to other Christians; to the fact that, as it is written, *Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

(3) *They attended constantly,* in the third place, *upon the breaking of the bread.* I need not say to any Christian what that expression means. Rather would I observe how instantly the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper took its place among the marks and tokens of the true Church; how from the very first it was understood that a Christian is one who observes all that Christ has commanded, and not least His dying charge, *This do in remembrance of me.* Doubtless in the first beginning of the Gospel the Lord's Supper was a daily celebration. And do you suppose that any of the three thousand dared or wished to turn their back upon it? Did they say, It is too sacred an ordinance for frequent use? Did they say, It is meant only for established Christians? Did they say, I will send for it when I am dying: not yet, not yet? Alas! these questions can be answered but in one way; but to scout them as suggestions of an impossibility: and yet how many of us are knowingly, wilfully, and throughout life, acting as if the charge, *This do,* had never been uttered, or as if the Apostles only had ever been addressed by it.

And no doubt there are those who could not without presumption or profaneness attend constantly on that breaking of bread. But does not that inability, of itself, startle them? Does not that conscious inability to approach the Lord's Table sound in their ears the condemning sentence, *Thou art none of Christ's: thou art yet in thy sins?* In nothing do we see more plainly the impotency of man to convince or persuade his brother, than in the resolute indifference on the part of many to repeated warnings and exhortations on the subject of that holy Sacrament. We would cease, if we durst, to urge it. The very summons is a weariness; and we know it. But a necessity is laid upon us; and conscience itself awakes within the sleeper to echo and to enforce the call. O that something better than conscience, even a heart penetrated and softened by the dew of God's grace, might

at last make that call audible, make it powerful, and make it persuasive!

(4) We have yet one stroke to add to this picture of the Christian life. *They were stedfast* also *in prayers.* No doubt they prayed in secret. No doubt it was a life of prayer. The charge which is to us far beyond and above, so that we treat it as hyperbolical if not exaggerated, *Pray without ceasing*, was to them, in its spirit, a literal precept. Their life was now above, *hidden with Christ in God*, and well might they exercise that life in offices of perpetual communion. Christ was to them not a name nor a doctrine, but a real and living Person, their Friend and their Saviour, their Lord and their God. They could not have too much of Him. They were as sure of His presence as if He were amongst them in human form; as sure of His loving care and guidance as if they saw His hand or heard His voice. Therefore a life of prayer was to them a life of happiness. Why should they not pray, pray constantly, pray without ceasing, to One in whom every hope centred, and from whom all goodness flowed?

But the particular place occupied by the word *prayers* in the text, leads us rather to think of public than of private prayer; of the worship of the congregation rather than of the worship of the secret chamber. It was a fourth mark of the Christian then, that he was constant in the prayers of the Church. It was not then, as it is now, that any little fluctuation of feeling, or any passing accident of weather or of company, can thin a congregation almost to nothing. It was not then the case, as it is now, that everything is more attractive than worship; an additional half hour's rest, a walk into the country, a newspaper or a novel: nothing felt to be so little worth exertion as the opportunity of joining in the Church's prayers or listening to the Church's teaching. Alas, my brethren, it is plain that we estimate differently from the early Christians the word privilege and the word enjoyment. We like to keep this world while we can: they loved to live in that world while still below. That which made them happy was to commune with their Saviour: to commune with

Him, not alone, but in the company of those who loved Him. They desired to lighten the pressure of things seen and temporal, and to grasp more firmly realities unseen and eternal. We do all we can to entrench ourselves in the present: and when at last we are torn from it by the rude hand of sorrow, sickness, or adversity, we leave its well-known haunts groaning and struggling, as though reality and life were here, shadow and gloom and darkness there.

Let it not be for nothing that these plain common words have been now spoken upon the Christian life of the first days of the Gospel. We have gone almost as far (such must be our reflections) from a primitive piety as from an original righteousness. The Gospel salt has indeed lost its savour: who shall season it? Apostolical teaching, Christian fellowship, holy Communion, public prayers, all are neglected; in comparison at least with the Scripture model, in comparison at least with the practice of the saints. O these languid, faint-hearted, listless gatherings, of a few from among many, of worshippers with the world in their hearts, of suppliants not caring to kneel or to pray! O for one hour of a brighter and a more fervent devotion, stirred by a deep sense of need, stimulated by a sure hope of acceptance! Let us set ourselves, beloved brethren, to recover, for ourselves at least, something of that which has decayed and is ready to die. Let us come hither as for a purpose: let us not depart hence unheard or unblessed. Let those of us whom unavoidable toils or duties do not bind elsewhere endeavour to keep alive through the week the flame of God's altar; coming together day by day to hear God's Word, to ask for things needful, and especially to remember in prayer the suffering, the sinful, and the prayerless. And let us and all remember that, as the fashion of this world passeth away, and the only unchanging existence is that of *Him which is and which was and which is to come;* so they only who live unto Him shall abide for ever, or know anything of that profound, that unbroken peace, which He, *not as the world giveth*, giveth to His people.

LECTURE VI.

CHURCH LIFE.

Acts ii. 47.

And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.

Some few features are still wanting to complete the portraiture of the early life of the Church. We gaze upon it as a whole with something of the same feeling which is awakened by standing before the picture of a little child, whose later history has been marked by sad and tragical incidents, or whose developed character has been full of infirmities, faults, and sins. No one imagined that that bright and beaming eye could always remain undimmed, that frank and open countenance continue for ever unclouded. And yet we might have hoped that the departure from that original beauty would have been somewhat less abrupt, or the fall from that original happiness somewhat less precipitate. We gaze and gaze on, recalling the later history or the developed character, till we can almost fancy that we see in the expression of the child something of an anticipative sadness, or in the lines of the young face something of an incipient debasement. And yet this is fancy; a freak of the imagination, rather than a conclusion of the understanding. Even so it is as we look, in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, upon a scene too fair to last. We would fain wing back our flight across the centuries

that lie between, and find ourselves in days when profession was all truth, and conduct all consistency. And yet perhaps in some minds the doubt has already arisen, whether in deed and in truth the condition of the primitive Church was so utterly unlike that of the actual; whether there must not be symptoms even there of that mixed condition which we behold here; whether the infant lineaments did not indicate in some respects the mature developement, and prepare us, in the exercise of a sober judgment, for the divisions and distractions, the faults and follies, of a later and a sadder age.

We dwelt last upon the collective life of the early Christians in four of its main characteristics. We saw them waiting assiduously on the teaching of the Apostles, who were enlightened, according to their Saviour's promise, to remember all that He had said to them, and commissioned (by His last charge) to teach His disciples everywhere to observe all that He had commanded them. We saw them carefully cherishing a spirit of fellowship or communion; regarding themselves not as isolated units, not as separate and self-contained bodies, but as members of *one* body, of which the living Head was Christ, and of which every single Christian was an essential part and limb. We saw them, in the third place, diligently availing themselves of every opportunity of breaking the sacred bread in the ordinance of their Lord's Supper; treating it as at once His latest and most solemn charge, and His latest and most precious legacy, to His people. We saw them, in the fourth and last place, persevering in prayers, not secret only or domestic, but social also and congregational. By these four marks men in those early days could take knowledge of one another that they were Christians indeed.

And now we shall endeavour by God's help to add some further particulars to this description; aided by the last five verses of the chapter which is still before us.

1. The first of these is, the effect produced upon beholders without. *And fear came upon every soul.* One explanation of this may be found in the clause which follows: *And many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles.* Proofs daily witnessed

of the Divine power and presence amongst them could not fail to strike fear into the hearts of those who looked on without obeying. But there is more yet than this in the apprehension described. We remember what was the effect upon the wicked king Herod of observing the character of John the Baptist. We are told by one of the Evangelists, that *Herod feared John*—little as he had to fear from him in an earthly sense; far as he was exalted above him in rank and wealth and power—*knowing that he was a just man and an holy; and observed him:* nay, more than this: *and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.* So strong was the awe which rested upon him, that he even obeyed many of the Baptist's exhortations, though there was one, just one, the most important of all, which he could not bring himself to regard. *Herod feared John, because he was a just man and an holy.* So it was with the observers of the primitive Church. *Fear came upon every soul.* This new kind of life, so serious, so devout, so devoted, so holy, struck awe as well as surprise into the beholders.

Christians do not always know their own power. They ever take it for granted that they are the weaker party. What fears, what anxious, what restless, what panic fears, do young Christians, more especially, often experience, in the prospect of the opposition, or contempt, or ridicule, of careless friends or sinful companions. They are often saying to themselves, How can I stand my ground against this taunt or that threat, against this jester or that tempter? Alas! it is the fear which makes the danger. Let them try: *let them commit the keeping of their souls to a faithful Creator,* and then go forward in the path of duty holding fast the word of truth, and they will find the saying again and again verified in them, *Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.* The difficulties in your path may seem insurmountable at a distance; but as often as you face them manfully in the name of Jesus, the words of the prophet Zechariah shall be made good in you, *Who art thou, O great mountain? before* God's servant *thou shalt become a plain. They said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when*

they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

My brethren, you have all of you the power of striking a wholesome and perhaps a saving fear into the enemies of Christ. It is done, not by you certainly, but through you, so often as you are enabled to set a bright and consistent example in your own conversation and in your own life. That is a testimony which men cannot gainsay. All else they may laugh at: your persuasions they may resist, your warnings they may despise, your arguments in defence of the faith they may upset and triumph over: but your example, at once self-denying and charitable, at once strict and sensible, will make its way into their consciences: you may never know it: they may, as they probably will, affect to be indifferent: but not for nothing (even with a view to these days) was it written, that, when men saw the Christian congregation continuing stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers, *fear came upon every soul.* That is the one weapon, which a woman, which a child may wield, and which no coat of mail is close enough to evade or strong enough to parry. God grant us all grace to use it better.

2. There is a second circumstance to be noticed in the life of those days. *And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

In the first ardour of that new conviction, with hearts already in heaven, filled with the daily anticipation of their Saviour's return, they obeyed literally the direction to *lay up for themselves no treasures on earth;* to *sell that they had, and give alms;* to *forsake all and follow Christ.* They could not bear to have, while another wanted. They saw too clearly the meaning and the reality of a Christian brotherhood to make it possible for them to be satisfied with giving thanks to God who *made them to differ*, while that very difference involved in it distress and suffering to any for whom, as for them, their Master had died. Nothing but a real community of goods could satisfy the Christian instincts of

that infant congregation. It was a beautiful and instructive sight to see that blending of all ranks in one communion and fellowship; to see rich and poor, high and low, old and young, not only practising charity but living in union. It was an example for all times, if not in form, yet in spirit.

Not in form. There is no inspired rule, applicable to all cases, for a community of goods among Christian men. Our own 38th Article declares this, and the Scriptures prove it. We find St Paul, for example, recommending in one of his Epistles a liberal contribution, according to the circumstances of each man, to the relief of the poor saints at Jerusalem; and in another, advising that on the first day of each week every one should *lay by him in store* for this purpose *as God had prospered him*. There could be no almsgiving, and no treasuring up, week by week, of the superfluity of that week's earnings, if in the Church of Corinth to which St Paul then wrote, there had been established, as a part of the Christian system, a compulsory or actual community of possessions. If this had been so, certainly the congregation alone, and not the individuals composing it, could have been called upon to contribute to the wants of a distant and necessitous Church.

How different, my brethren, was this example of a community of goods from anything which the world has since witnessed! It has been the dream of theorists of all kinds, religious and political, to see all distinction of ranks levelled, and a whole congregation, or a whole nation, living in brotherly concord upon the common property of all. We believe that every such scheme has been based upon assumptions hasty in themselves and mischievous in their consequences. In Christian bodies the attempt to establish a system of communion has led more often to the exclusion than to the consideration of the poor. Selfishness has entered in to mar the work of charity; and the society framed on the principle of a voluntary mutual confiscation has been a society of the rich alone, in which confiscation itself involved no sacrifice. Among political speculators the principle of communism has been too often absolutely anti-Christian; and a hatred of subordina-

tion, which is in other words a refusal to accept the rule of God's providence and to live in God's world as He has arranged it, has been the secret spring of much professed zeal for the rights of man, and of much declamation upon the interests of society.

The example before us was of a widely different kind from either of these. It was the spontaneous, the natural, and the temporary effect of a fresh faith, a lively hope, and a genuine charity. In its form it was not and it could not be permanent. While it continued, it was a wonderful testimony to the strength of the new religion in the hearts of those who believed. *See how these Christians love*, might well be the comment of those who looked on upon a scene so unlike the world of common life. If the Gospel can make a man part with his all; give to the common stock that which he prized chiefly because it was exclusively his own; and be content to live like any poor man upon *the daily ministration* of the alms of the Church; at least there must have been something in it: judge ye, my brethren, what there is, in heaven or in earth, which would have made any one of us *go and do likewise.*

And though the form of that entire self-sacrifice may vary; and we believe that Christ our Master designed that it should vary with the varying circumstances of the world and of His Church; let us not forget that the spirit of this life must be ours also. If it be best on the whole for the true welfare of society, if it be consistent therefore with the will of Him *whose never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth*, that each man have his own store and his own purse; that each man be the possessor of the fruits of his own toil, and the uncontrolled steward of his own resources; if many high and Christian purposes are answered by that gradation of ranks and that variety of fortunes which, whether we will or no, certainly is the form of human society under which God has placed us; yet let us not forget that one end, perhaps the chief end, to be answered by this arrangement, is, that each man, *working with his hands the thing that is good*, may thereby *have to give to him that needeth*; that every one may be able to exercise his individual judgment,

and (to a certain extent) his individual choice, upon various objects of piety and charity proposed to him; but certainly not that any one may be at liberty to say, as a Christian man, I prefer keeping to myself, and to my own, all that I possess; I disown altogether the character of Christ's steward and of Christ's dispenser; I will impart nothing, or I will impart sparingly to others, however much they may be in need.

3. We will not return to the mention of points already enumerated, and therefore we will pass lightly over the next words of the passage, which tell us how the early Christians *continued daily with one accord in the temple*, still keeping the appointed hours of the national worship, and *broke bread at home;* that is, received the sacred bread of the Lord's Supper in the privacy of their own body, in one or more of those houses, or *upper rooms*, which still, as at first, though in larger numbers, sheltered their devotion. But we must pause for a moment on the description of their private and domestic life which follows; how they *did eat their meat—partook of food* is the exact expression—*in gladness and singleness* (*simplicity*) *of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.*

The life of a Christian ought to be a happy life. The life of a true Christian will be a happy life. His very food has a blessing. He praises God over it. He partakes of it in gladness. It is to him the token of a Father's love, the indication of a Father's hand. He receives it, as out of God's hand, in his own. And the heart which is glad is also described further as a *single* or a *simple* heart. The word denotes properly *smooth* or *level:* it is the epithet of a field or a road out of which the stones have been carefully gathered, so that it presents no impediment to the plough of the husbandman or the feet of the traveller. *A stoneless heart* is one which has no impediments or obstacles in it; one out of which the roughnesses of temper and the stumblingblocks of sin have been removed by grace, so that it is now level and even, smooth in its course and gentle in its contact.

And these last words may explain to us how it should be that a life of which we have just read that it inspired fear is described

also as one of *favour with all the people.* The paradox is more in sound than in sense. It is true that a Christian life, when it is blameless and consistent, is a witness against the sinfulness and the carelessness which surrounds it. It awakens slumbering consciences, testifying of realities above not to be forgotten without danger. In this aspect, it inspires awe. But in another aspect it is altogether lovely. The world around would be worse even than we find it, if it failed to recognize as attractive that which is *true and honest and just and pure and lovely and of good report.* Let a man be in deed to others that which he would they should be to him, and I say not that they will love him for his religion, but I do say that they will love him in spite of it. It is written of One who was Man and God also, that, as He *increased in wisdom and stature,* He increased also *in favour with God and man.* So is it with His people. Men often show their religion in the most unattractive, the most repulsive form, and then regard their own unpopularity as a proof of the world's hatred against religion. Let them exhibit their religion in its aspect of a world-wide charity, and they will find it otherwise. They will find that, while it inspires awe as God's witness, their religion wins love also as the friend of man.

4. Finally, let us fix our attention on the words of the text itself. *And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.* We need not stay to vindicate this verse from the misconstructions of a false theology; or to show that there is nothing here of a Divine selection fixing by an arbitrary sentence who should and who should not be heirs of salvation. The words themselves say, that *the Lord added to the congregation* of the faithful *day by day those who were in the course* (*in the process*) *of salvation.* Salvation, if in one sense a single act, is in another sense a course of acts. A man may forfeit salvation: he may grieve the Holy Spirit: he may quench the Holy Spirit: he may fall away and never be renewed again unto salvation. These things are possible: and while these things are possible, it is as much as we can say of any man that he is *in course of salvation.* And a great thing it is to be able to say this. We cannot say

this of a man who is trifling; or of a man who is a despiser of the means of grace; or of a man who is cherishing any known sin. And therefore it is not a light thing to say of a man that he is *being saved.* God grant that we might be able to say it of all who are gathered together to worship! God grant that there be none here who are not seeking salvation as the one thing needful; none who are not willing to give up all else for it; none who are not using the means of grace with all diligence as the great blessing and privilege of dying men and women in a world of sorrow and sin; none who are not seeking to *cleanse themselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.*

We shall notice one or two plain truths in conclusion.

(1) It is *the Lord* who adds. *The Lord* is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is at work in all that affects the well-being of His Church below. If it were not so, who could endure, who could hope? Without Him, without His Holy Spirit, what is man? What would be Paul or Apollos or Cephas, could they return to us from the dead—much more, what are we, poor, feeble, erring, uninspired men—without the living grace of the Holy Spirit of God working with us or working without us in the hearts of the congregation and of the world below? It was He who *opened the heart* of the first convert at Philippi, *that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul.* And it is He who opens hearts now to attend to the things spoken by His ministers. O, which of all of us asked Him for help and grace before we came hither this evening? We need it more than some of you think. We want new converts. We want new members of the real congregation of grace. We want new communicants. We want new attendants upon the daily prayers of the Church. We want new enquirers after the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And who can add these to our number, save the Lord only? To Him therefore let our eyes and our hearts be ever lifted up.

(2) It is *to the Church* that the Lord adds. It is not only secret desires, secret resolutions, secret prayers, that we need awakening in us: there must be an adding to the Church and to

the Congregation. It is the object of these Sermons to awaken within us a deeper sense of the meaning and importance of a collective Christian life. We ought to be not only (though this be a great thing) a pious people, not only a moral and religious people, not only (though this be a great thing, and the root of all) men and women fulfilling life's duties and satisfying life's relations in the fear of God; but also a people honouring God together, walking to heaven together, together serving Christ, and together working righteousness. Think of these things: shut not up your religion in a selfish isolation, but stir up by mutual help the grace that is in each singly.

(3) Lastly, I would bid you concentrate your thoughts on the brief but significant word *daily*, or *day by day*. The course of this world is a fleeting, a transitory, a rapid thing: we are here to-day, and to-morrow there: to-day in health, to-morrow in sickness; to-day in prosperity, to-morrow in distress; to-day in life, to-morrow in death. In the meantime can we say that there is a daily progress in the things of eternity? Can we say that we are to-day in darkness and to-morrow in the light? to-day in course of ruin, to-morrow in course of salvation? Can we say that each day adds some one to the true Church and fold of Christ? *The Lord's arm is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that He cannot hear.* Then why this stagnation? why this pause and intermission in the work of grace? Why is it that a minister counts himself happy if in the course of a long and faithful service he has seen but one or two souls gathered into his Lord's true Church below? What has become of the word *daily?* Can we afford, any better than the primitive Christians, to lose time in this work of adding? Who has been gathered to-day? who yesterday? who last week? who last month, or last year? The world stops not for our loitering: sickness and adversity stop not, life and death stop not, while we linger: God of His infinite mercy make us feel the value of time, and count each day lost that has not added to His Church *one* that shall be saved.

LECTURE VII.

THE FIRST MIRACLE.

ACTS III. 19, 21.

The times of refreshing.....The times of restitution.

Two of the Apostles, Peter and John, went up together to the Temple at one of the stated hours of the national worship. Though they had now a new faith and a new devotion, they did not therefore forget or forsake the old. The Gospel was to them the fulfilment of the Law, not its instant abrogation. They saw in it *the hope of Israel, the promise made of God unto their fathers;* and they never admitted that in becoming Christians they had ceased to be Israelites: they could still believe and still worship with their nation, though that nation might refuse to believe and to worship with them. *We are the circumcision,* they might say, *which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.* Thus they continued daily *with one accord in the temple* as regularly as they *broke bread* in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper *at home.* They still attended at the morning and evening sacrifices, rejoicing in the sign of the one great Atonement, even when the thing signified was already come. The day was drawing on, when God's own hand would abolish the Mosaic ritual by the destruction of the city which He had chosen, and of the House of which He had said, *My name shall be there.* Till then Jew and Christian trod its courts together.

On the occasion of which we are now to read, Peter and John visited the Temple at the ninth hour—three o'clock in the afternoon—the hour of the offering of the evening sacrifice. At the entrance of the Temple-court, they fell in with what was in fact a familiar and daily occurrence; the carrying of a lame man, lame from his birth, and now more than forty years old, to occupy his usual station at that which was commonly called the Beautiful Gate. There he was set or laid day after day to attract the commiseration of the charitable as they passed him on their way to worship. On this occasion he addressed his cry for charity to the two Apostles; common men, to all appearance; distinguished in no way by any outward sign, as pillars of the new Church, or temples (in their own persons) of the Holy Ghost: he addressed to them his usual petition, with no expectation of any but the usual reply. But the day was to be an eventful one for him. Instead of giving or refusing to give, and passing on, as others passed, into the Temple-precincts, the two men stopped and fixed upon him an earnest gaze. *Look on us*, they said. His attention was arrested. He hoped to receive something from them. Long had his wishes been restricted to the hope of a successful day's begging: thoughts of health and vigour, of motion and enjoyment, had all these years been crushed and mortified; all he looked for was his daily bread, and even that not earned by wholesome toil but dependent upon a precarious pity. He was compelled, under God's afflicting hand, to say (unlike one of whom we read in the Gospel), *To beg I am* not *ashamed.* Men learn at last to accommodate themselves to the most distasteful circumstances: even hope, the most pertinacious of human feelings, bounds itself by probabilities; and the cripple *who never has walked* counts it an impossibility, and nothing less, that the power of motion should ever come to him. What must be his astonishment, if he hears two common passers-by address him in these remarkable words, *Silver and gold have I none: but what I have, that I give thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.* The first impulse surely must be not astonishment only but resentment; indignation at an unfeeling banter

which does but mock his woes. But no: the hand of the speaker is extended; it grasps his own; a strange strength, unfelt before, communicates itself to the foot and to the ancle; he finds himself able to spring from the ground, able to stand, able to walk; a moment afterwards he is entering with his benefactors into the Temple-court, walking with a bounding step, and giving thanks and praise to *the God of his health.*

The worshippers who crowded the place at that solemn hour were witnesses of the scene. *All the people saw him walking and praising God: and they recognized him as the very man who sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had befallen him.* He was still clinging to the two Apostles in the first transport of grateful attachment, when the whole multitude *ran together to them* in that part of the sacred precincts which was called *the porch* or colonnade *of Solomon.* It was there that Jesus Himself had walked not long before, as we read in the 10th chapter of St John's Gospel, in the winter season, at the festival of the Dedication. There too, as one of the following chapters of this book records, the company of the believers were accustomed to congregate, while a solemn awe rested upon the hearts of others, forbidding them to pretend or to intrude.

The moment was favourable for one of those impressive and spirit-stirring addresses by which St Peter in these earliest days, speaking under the inspiration of God, added so largely to the numbers of the Church of Christ. His tone, on this as on a former occasion, was that of one who can see nothing marvellous, nothing surprising, in a Divine Person proving Himself true and proving Himself powerful. *Why marvel ye at this man? or why gaze ye upon us, as though by any power or godliness of our own we had caused that he should walk?* Is that the only explanation that you can give of the scene before you? It is a great thing, my brethren, when we begin to feel it to be natural that a living Saviour should also work. We have so long taken it for granted that nothing can really come of the Gospel that it is indeed as life from the dead when we see the reasonableness of

expecting Jesus Christ to fulfil His own word. That is St Peter's argument here. *Why marvel ye at this?* The real secret is soon told. There is One above, exalted after humiliation, glorified after suffering, alive after death, whose hand is here working. *The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers*—no new, no unknown God, but One whom for years and generations you have owned and worshipped—*glorified His Servant Jesus: raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory; declared Him to be His own Son with power by resurrection from the dead;* and then *glorified Him with His own self with the glory which He had with Him before the world was.*

You indeed *delivered Him up;* gave Him into Gentile hands, praying that He might be crucified. *You denied Him in the presence of Pilate;* indignantly repelled from Him the appellation of *King of the Jews*, and overbore by your violence the repeated confession of the magistrate that *he found no fault in Him.* Thus *you denied the Holy One and the Just, and demanded a murderer to be granted to you. Not this man*, you cried, *but Barabbas!* and *Barabbas was a robber*, and not a robber only but a murderer. He *had committed murder in the insurrection.* It is true, you did not with your own hands take that sacred blood: but God sees through these sophistries, and counts as done by you that which you *got* done. *You killed the Prince (Author) of life:* but *God raised Him from the dead, and we are His witnesses:* we saw Him dead, and we saw Him risen.

And it is *His name, through faith in His name*, which *made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea*, it is *the faith which is through Him*, faith in God through Jesus Christ, which *gave him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. His name:* He Himself, revealed as God and Man, as crucified and risen and glorified; He Himself, as that which He is, performed this cure; gave this miraculous, this perfect soundness of which you all are witnesses. And as His name, which is He Himself, was the true Author, so faith in His name, in that name which is He Himself, was the true and only instrument of the miracle. In His name, as His commissioned and accredited servants, we did that we did:

to Him we looked up; from Him we drew the power: we who wrought tell you how we wrought, by what means, in whose strength. But for Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, we had neither undertaken it nor succeeded. He lives, He works, He hath *all power in heaven and in earth: by Him*, by Him alone, and through faith in Him, *doth this man stand here before you whole.*

And think not, brethren, that we would bear hard upon you for your part in that guilt of sacred blood. *I know that by ignorance ye acted;* even as He Himself prayed on the cross for His murderers, and said, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* You ought to have known, but you did not. *I did it ignorantly in unbelief.* And through that guilty yet ignorant act of man there was wrought out a mysterious but most real purpose of divine love. *Things which God fore-announced by the mouth of all the prophets*, namely, *that His Christ should suffer, He so fulfilled.* He brought unto good that which you meant only for evil: through the murder of His beloved Son was accomplished a world-wide redemption.

And yet there is room.

Repent therefore, and be converted (*change your minds, and turn ye*) *that your sins may be blotted out* (*unto the cancelling* or *obliteration of your sins*); *that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send forth Him that hath been prepared for you, Christ Jesus, whom heaven must have received*—must retain—*until* certain *times of restitution of all things, which God spake of by the mouth of His holy prophets from eternity.*

Here are (1) the conditions of salvation by Christ: repentance, and conversion; change of mind, and change of life: reviewing the past with true contrition, and turning to God with full purpose of amendment: (2) the immediate result, forgiveness; the cancelling of sin; the obliteration of the guilty record; the *casting all our sins* (as the prophet Micah says) *into the depths of the sea;* the so passing by, the so dismissing, the sins of those who truly repent, that He remembers them no more: and

(3) the future result; *repent and turn...that so there may come from God's presence seasons of refreshing;* that so, the number of His elect being at last accomplished, He may send Jesus Christ, the Saviour, whom He hath prepared for you, and who is now in heaven awaiting the arrival of those times of restitution, restoration, reparation of all things, which have been the great subject of divine prediction from the first day that God spake to fallen man even unto this hour. The arrival of the times thus described is made to depend upon the repentance and conversion of man. Repent and turn, in order that those times may come. Certainly without repentance and conversion those times will never come to *you*. But, more than that, those times will not come until the number of God's elect be full. And St Peter tells us that those times are even delayed lest any soul should be cut short in its impenitence. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* When those times do come, repentance will be precluded, will be impossible. And *the day of the Lord*, however delayed, *will come*, St Peter adds, *as a thief in the night.*

I would turn your thoughts, in conclusion, to the two aspects, presented in the text itself, of the future which the Gospel reveals to us. The period to be introduced by the second coming of the Saviour, the period which we often describe by the incorrect but expressive term 'eternity,' will be first a period of *refreshing*, and secondly, a period of *restitution.*

1. A period of *refreshing.* The word thus rendered is properly a revival by fresh air; the consequence of letting in a breeze of cool and invigorating air upon one who has been long fainting under a sultry and oppressive atmosphere. Such a revival as that, will be the result of the second Advent of Christ to all who look for Him and love His appearing; to all who are through this life waiting and watching for Him, with the girded loins of a Christian diligence, and with the burning lights of a Christian vigilance.

Times of refreshing. Do not we want such times? Are we

not all conscious of the oppressive weight, as it were, of this world's atmosphere? Do we not all feel ourselves oftentimes fainting with the closeness and sultriness of the air we are forced to breathe? I speak of our hearts and souls, not of our bodies: what a load seems here to lie upon them! Who has not often said with the Psalmist, *O that I had wings like a dove: for then would I flee away and be at rest?* It is not so much of the oppression of unkindness or persecution that we now speak: that is rather, as the Psalmist found it, *a stormy wind and tempest*, which may indeed shake our home, or scatter far and wide the blossoms of earthly hope, but which has in it something of a wholesome severity, preventing us from making our rest here, and rousing our whole being (if we be Christians indeed) into a more resolute and vigorous vitality. We speak rather now of a sultry closeness; of that stifling heat which at once indisposes and incapacitates for exertion; of that sense of breathing an exhausted air, or living in a crowded cabin, which paralyzes every energy, and at last forbids repose itself. Even thus it is, in different degrees, with all Christians here below. How seldom does the refreshing breath of God's Holy Spirit revive them into the buoyancy of conscious life and health! How seldom does the sweet influence of the divine presence lift them into that upper air, where no earth-born cloud darkens their sky, and no noxious vapour damps or poisons their atmosphere! They can tell the times when this has been their bright experience. They remember, once in a year, or once in a lifetime, a season of sweet refreshment, when God was perceptibly near them, and they breathed in perfect freedom the air of a heavenly communion. But far more often they would have described themselves as persons sighing for light and air, hungering for food, thirsting for water; just able to keep alive one spark of faith in the great future, but living for the present in a murky dimness with which the thought of heaven and of God was wholly incongruous and uncongenial. The world seems to close us in with a narrow and narrowing compression, until the very idea of an expansive freedom becomes unnatural to us and unreal. In

prosperity, the air of earth is laden with a luscious perfume, lulling us into a stupor which is no repose. In adversity, we seem to be confined within the walls of a sick room, from which worldly pleasure is banished, without the admission of a heavenly visitant. These things may be called by some the morbidnesses of a religious fancy: but none the less would we appeal to the hearts of those here present before God, whether there is not in the description a semblance at least of their own experience; whether they, as a matter of fact, do not desire, and do not urgently need, that great change of which St Peter here speaks as a season of refreshing; when *the souls of the faithful, delivered from the burden of the flesh*, shall be *in joy and felicity;* or rather (for it is to a further point still that our eyes are directed) when the soul which has had its rest shall be reunited to the body which has undergone its transformation, and when the entire man, complete in soul and in body, shall be for ever in his Saviour's presence, permitted to enjoy it, and qualified to enjoy it, through the ages of the eternal age.

2. The same prospect is described further as a time of *restitution*. What a tangled, disordered, inverted thing is the world as we see it! What a scene of departure from an original arrangement; of deterioration from any condition in which God could ever have pronounced it to be *very good*. *The whole creation*, St Paul writes, *groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now: and not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption.* Only see, for example, how the *relations* of life are disorganized. See what misfortunes, see what sorrows, see what crimes, spring out of the affections. See the hearts of fathers turned from their children, and the hearts of children from their fathers. See the weaker and the more trusting half of mankind made the sport and the victim of the stronger and the less sensitive. See the distinction of ranks now cruelly aggravated, and now violently obliterated. Is it not the very scene of which it was written of old in God's Holy Book, *I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great*

and dreadful day of the Lord...Elias verily cometh first and restoreth all things...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse? And under the government of a righteous and holy God can it be conceived that this state of things should be perpetual? Is not the very extent of the ruin a prophecy of the restoration? Can it be that God should thus have made all things in vain, and suffered His own beautiful handywork to be thus marred and desolated finally? It has been the language of all prophecy, St Peter here says, from the very first to the very last of that *goodly fellowship*, that there shall be a time of restitution, a time of reparation, of rectification, of restoration of all things. *We*, the same Apostle writes in his latest Epistle, *according to His promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* He who created can recreate: He who made man in His own image can renew him in that image after His Son's likeness.

And shall it not be a comfort to the true Christian, sorely vexed by the experience, and more sorely tried by the observation, of a world thus perverted, to look forward to the arrival of that time when the ways of God shall be finally justified to the universe? How does it become us to see that we ourselves be not adding to the confusion; be not introducing fresh discords into the Babel of a fallen world. Although *the restoration of all things* is not yet; although no efforts and no prayers of ours can make *the wicked* here *cease from troubling*, or lull the suffering world into a repose which belongs not to time; yet let us remember that there is a restitution, there is a reparation, there is a reconstruction, which belongs all to time; a repentance and a conversion which, if not realized here, can be realized nowhere; a renewal of soul, and an amendment of life, under the sweet and powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, which is the condition of our ever being admitted into the world in which dwelleth only righteousness. It is easy for us to dream a poet's dream of sweet pastures and sunny fountains and white-robed companies and harpers harping with their harps; it is easy to picture to ourselves a scene of freedom and innocence and happiness, in

which cruelty and lust, sin and sorrow, are names unknown: but these things are altogether apart from the work, in soul and body, of men and women living this life as it is, traversing the waste and howling wilderness towards a rest which remains hereafter for the people of God. If we would ever enter heaven, we must begin it here. If we would ever see the restoration of all things, we must struggle day by day here for our own. We are very far gone from an original righteousness: we have lost the bright and clear mark, as in the forehead, of the divine likeness: we have within us many a dangerous, many a fatal seed of disease: we have formed in ourselves, or suffered, many a habit, in thought and word, in act and will, most opposite to the Spirit's teaching, most opposite to the Saviour's example: these things must be got rid of, must be displaced, must be reversed, by honest, humble, secret efforts, made day by day in God's strength, and renewed day by day, after failure and defeat, through God's longsuffering grace, if we would ever know what it is to cross the great gulf between saved and lost, or to have our part in the glorious *manifestation of the sons of God.*

God give us all grace to set ourselves earnestly to this task. He who calls us is faithful, and He also will do it. Where He bids us go, He leads: He prevents with His Spirit, He follows with His blessing. To Him let us commit ourselves; to the Father, to the Saviour, to the Spirit. What we know not now, He will teach; where we mistake, He will pity; when we stray, He will bring us back. Only resist Him not. Say not to Him, your one Friend, *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for Thee:* but rather pray Him to remain with you henceforth, till your change come: yea, say of Him as He hath taught you, *This God is our God for ever and ever: He shall be our guide unto death;* unto death, and through death, and after death, through the years which have no number, through the life which knows no ending.

LECTURE VIII.

THE GOSPEL BLESSING.

Acts iii. 26.

Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

St Peter is accounting for a great miracle. A man well known by sight and name to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; a man crippled from his birth, and supported from day to day by the charity of persons visiting the Temple; had suddenly risen, at the command of two of the Apostles, in the fulness of health and activity.

Men say that miracles are not the most convincing proofs of Revelation. We often hear that inward evidences are more satisfactory to the mind of this age than outward. And we are sometimes tauntingly reminded of those extraordinary phenomena of animal magnetism, which have convinced so many intelligent observers, and of which perhaps no intelligent observer ought to deny the truth. But does any amount of proof, however convincing or unanswerable, make those phenomena into miracles? Wonders, marvels, prodigies, they may be: but a miracle (in the Christian sense) is a sign of something; not a mere portent, but a portent pointing to something, attesting something, calling

men to believe something, to do something, to believe in some One, and to give themselves to His service. These wonders, if proved, must be accepted: the judgment, if it cannot doubt their truth, must admit them among other facts, and wait to see what place God designs them to fill among the experiences or among the endowments or among the responsibilities of His creatures. But they do not therefore either weaken the force or divide the interest of the great miracles of the Gospel. We have much, no doubt, still to learn as to the connection between mind and matter, between the soul and the body, between the world of spirit and the world of sense. And every new thing which we learn concerning these things must be tested in the common way by evidence, and not necessarily suspected as an enemy to religion or to Christ. But how different from the most marvellous of these new fragments of discovery, is the smallest and least striking of the miracles which attested the Gospel. They were distinctly wrought in proof of the Messiahship and of the Divinity of Jesus. Each one of them was an appeal to God's Omnipotence to give testimony to the truth of His Son's mission and Gospel. And if the God of truth, the God who hates a lie, the God who abhors and unmasks imposture, gave that attestation; if He exercised a superhuman and supernatural power at the prayer of one who invoked it in the name of Jesus Christ; what beholder could fail to draw the inference that the revelation thus attested was true, or to thank God for planting that revelation on the rock of demonstrated fact, instead of leaving it for the disputations of the wise or the speculations of the sceptic?

The Gospel was designed for all men; for the poor and ignorant many, as well as for the widely read and profoundly thoughtful. And it suits that character, that its first evidences should have been evidences of sight and sense. We may value more highly evidences of a different kind: we may be more struck by the adaptation of the Gospel to human want, or by its transforming effect upon human characters and human lives. We may feel that it has an echo within, which satisfies us beyond all contradiction that its voice is the voice of the Creator.

And we do well to treasure up these evidences, every one of them, against that *cloudy and dark day* when any one of us may want them all. But let us not be so unthankful as to disparage that first evidence of power, of a power above man's, exercised upon that part of man of which the senses can take cognizance, which the miracles of the Gospels and of the Acts present to us. Let us admit indeed that a religion of power only would be a poor religion for a world of fallen men. Let us place side by side with the power the wisdom also and the holiness and the beneficence of Christ. Let us not disunite what God has joined, or lay the whole stress of our faith upon what is but a part and not the whole of God's demonstration. Yet let us all, let the poor and humble amongst us more especially, thank God for what He has vouchsafed to us in this evidence of miracle and of outward sign. Let us place ourselves, in thought, amongst the multitude who looked on here upon the man that was healed, and recognized in the erect and vigorous form before them the suffering and decrepit figure which had long lain for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. Yes, my brethren, we should all have been glad of that demonstration of the Gospel: we may all be glad of it still, as it lies here before us in the simple history of the first days of Christianity.

This was the text of St Peter's Sermon: well may it be also sometimes the text of ours. Here is a fact before you: how do you account for it? St Peter says that it is easily accounted for. Believe that God raised up His Son Jesus: believe that what Jesus said was true, and that what Jesus did He did as God's Christ: and all is intelligible, all is consistent, all is natural, at once. Did not your own Prophets foretell of these things? What has been from the first the burden of all Prophecy? Has it not been the announcement of a new scene, a new order of things, which should harmonize the confusions of the world, and redress the inequalities of time? And has not the promise of this coming age of refreshing and restitution been ever associated in holy Scripture with the person, the suffering, and the exaltation of a Saviour? Thus it was that, in the earliest days of our

nation, the great Lawgiver of the first Dispensation was instructed to foretell the coming of One greater and mightier than himself. Moses himself said, *A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from among your brethren, as* He first raised *me: Him shall ye hear according to all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall be, that every soul which shall not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.* It was thus that God calmed the fears of the nation, as it stood trembling before that visible mountain which quaked and burned with His manifested presence. The prayer was, *Let not God speak with us, lest we die.* The answer was, The day is come, saith the Lord, when one shall come to speak with you, in whom the terrors of Deity shall be exchanged for the sympathies of humanity; yea, in whom God and Man shall so meet together and be at one, that the fallen race may both trust Him without presumption and worship Him without fear.

Yea, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow in order – from the very beginning of the prophetic succession to its close—*as many as spoke, also announced these days.* Even those of the Prophets in whose writings there occurs no direct prediction of the Messiah, yet bore a general testimony to the work and counsels of God; pointed onwards to a time, nearer or more distant, of refreshing and restitution; and kept alive in men's hearts, through the darkest night of doubt and sorrow, a sure faith in God's purpose to repair the breaches of His earthly house, and to heal the stroke of His people's wound. Even these more general predictions gave testimony to the plan of His grace. Even they told of reparation after ruin, and thus echoed the primeval declaration of a salvation to be perfected through suffering: *It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

And ye whom I now address, men of Israel, children of the stock of Abraham, *ye are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant (engagement) which God made toward your fathers, saying to Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.* You have entered, by God's Providence, into the

inheritance of those blessings which Prophets and righteous men of old foretold and longed after; even of that great comprehensive promise made to the father of the faithful, that in One who should be born of his seed according to the flesh, not one nation only, but all the families of the earth, should find their rest and happiness and blessing.

To you first God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him forth blessing you in the turning away each one from your iniquities.

To you first. Among all nations, it was our Lord's parting commission, *beginning at Jerusalem. It was necessary*, said Paul and Barnabas to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, *that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. To you first:* if you refuse it, then to the Gentiles.

Having raised up. It is the same word as in the 22nd verse: *A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you*, &c. It expresses the whole work of preparing, equipping, and presenting, by which a Saviour or Deliverer is made available for and introduced into His mission. But more especially may it be understood of that raising up from death, by which our Saviour passed into the fulness of His Messiahship and of His Priesthood. Not until He had died and risen and ascended was He the full and perfect Saviour of fallen and sinful man.

Sent Him forth. Not only or chiefly during His earthly life and personal ministry below; but rather as He now goes forth, in His Word, by His ministers, and by His Holy Spirit, upon the work of converting sinners and building up those who believe. The mission began on earth, in His teaching and in His example: but it continues still, in the exercise of all those offices of intercession, mediation, and divine grace, by which the risen Saviour gives efficacy to His Gospel, and in the results of which, as it is written, He *sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied.*

Sent Him forth *blessing you.* The word is borrowed from the promise made to Abraham, *In thy seed shall all the families*

of the earth be blessed. To bless is properly *to speak well of, to pronounce good upon* another. But, when God blesses, it is more than speaking well; more than pronouncing good: the word of God is with power; and along with the word goes also the act of communicating good. *To speak good of* is also, in God, *to do good to.* That then is the mission of Christ, as it is exercised now from heaven. God sends Him forth blessing men. And that blessing is not a mere word of commendation or satisfaction: it is an act, it is a power, also. God sends Him forth communicating as well as speaking good.

And to complete the exposition of the text, we must ask also, How? how does Christ bless? how does He communicate good? And the answer is, *In the turning away each one of you from your iniquities.* That is how Christ speaks good of us, which is, in other words, does good, communicates good, to us.

Such is our word of exhortation for this time. Let us ponder together the account here given us of Christ's work, and of God's work in Christ.

1. For that will be our first remark; that the work is not described only as Christ's, but rather as God's work in Christ. We are too ready to make a difference between God and Christ; to think of God (it may be) as all justice, and of Christ as all love. In past days men have used a loose and unscriptural language about Christ's calming God's wrath; Christ interposing between God the Judge of all and man the sinner. That is not scriptural, and therefore not true or wholesome language. I hope there is less of it now than there once was. The language of Scripture is always this: *God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son. God loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* Let us hold fast that language. We all need it. *God having raised up His Son* (or rather, *His Servant*) *sent Him to bless you. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.* What things soever the Son doeth, these also doeth the Father likewise. There is but one will; there is but one work: the Father raised up the Son, and sent

Him to bless you. Never run away from God, but ever seek Him and see Him in the Son.

2. Again, observe that Christ, already raised from the dead, has a mission to us. God, after raising Him up, sends Him to bless us. There is no thought more delightful, when we ponder it, than that of the mission of Christ as He now is in heaven; of His having an errand, an apostleship (as we might render it), still towards us. It is thus that in the Epistle to the Hebrews Christians are addressed as *partakers of a heavenly calling*, and desired to *consider the Apostle as well as the High Priest of their profession, Christ Jesus.* We are all called to from heaven: that is the meaning of *partakers of a heavenly calling.* We are all like Saul of Tarsus when Jesus Christ spoke to him suddenly from heaven, asking why he resisted Him, and then promising him direction as to what he should do. That is what Jesus Christ, in a less visible and audible way, is doing at this moment to each of us. He is calling to us. In His Word, by His minister, in conscience, yes, I trust, by His Spirit also. And then, as we recognize this truth, we are told also to fix our thoughts upon Him as *the Apostle of our profession* (or *confession*); that is, as One whom our common faith teaches us to regard as having a mission to us. God has sent, is sending, Him to us, with a message, with an errand, with a commission, addressed to each one of us separately. Surely there is great force, and great beauty, and great attractiveness, in this view of Christ. It is a personal, an individual view of Christ. *Every one of you*, the text says: not a vague, general, promiscuous mission, but a direct and a separate and a single one to each. God sends Jesus Christ to you, and to you, and to you. You are not lost in a crowd. The time and the place and the circumstances of your being were all prearranged and foreordained for you; and the mission of Jesus Christ to you is addressed and adapted to your particular case and need. If this be so, *how*, how indeed, *shall we escape, if we neglect so great* (because so minute and so personal) *a salvation?*

3. And, once more, a mission of what sort? an apostleship of what form and kind? Is the mission of Christ to us that of

One who comes from the dead to appal and to terrify? the apparition of a reprover and a prophet of evil? Hear the word of the text: *sent Him to bless you;* to speak well of you; to declare good to you; and in the very act of doing so, to communicate the good of which He tells. Is not this the very notion of a Gospel? A Gospel is joyful tidings. It is not a threatening, it is not a reproof, it is not even a condition of acceptance, or a rule of duty: it does not say, like the Law, *Do this, and thou shalt live:* its essential character is that of an announcement; tidings of something done, already done; the good news of some change which God has made in our state and in our prospects. Let us learn to see this in the Gospel; to see this as the essence of the Gospel: that it is not, in the first instance, a command, or a law, or a revelation of duty, but an announcement of something on God's behalf. And what is that something? Surely this: that God forgives us: whatsoever we are, He forgives us; forgives us freely, and bids us to believe ourselves forgiven, through the merits and mediation of His own beloved Son. That is the *blessing* which is Christ's mission. It is the speaking well of us; not as we are in ourselves, not as we ever shall be in ourselves, or in our own attainments in grace, but as persons who are so happy as to be forgiven freely; persons whose state is made delightful, after being most wretched, because God has *blotted out the handwriting* of condemnation *which was against us*, and has *taken it out of the way, nailing it to Christ's cross.* My brethren, the longer we live, the more firmly shall we be persuaded of the appropriateness of this one only Gospel to the state and need of man. It is not the form in which man would have framed his Gospel: he would have thought it dangerous—he often has thought it dangerous—to begin with mercy before judgment. *But wisdom is justified by her children:* and *he that is of God heareth God's words. God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him* not to curse but *to bless;* sent Him *not to judge the world but to save.*

4. But, finally, how is this mission of blessing made effectual? Is it a flattering of human vanity? Is it a lulling of human indolence? Is it the intelligence that God has forgiven

and that therefore man may lie asleep in his sins? Is it the announcement that, *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound,* and that therefore *we may continue in sin* if only to swell the triumphs of divine grace? None of these things. *Sent Him to bless you*—to speak good of you, and to do you good —*in turning away each one of you from his iniquities.* Does this description of Christ's work seem to militate against the former? Does any one say, Then, after all, the Gospel is a law: it is only the old story once again, You must be holy, and then God will save? O the ignorance and the hardness of these hearts of ours! Is there no difference between working for forgiveness and working from forgiveness? Is there no difference, real and practical, between being holy because we are loved, and being holy that we may be loved? Is there no difference, once again, between the being commanded to turn ourselves from our sins, and the being blessed by finding ourselves turned from them by another? Your own hearts tell you that there is all the difference. Which of us knows not something of the force of gratitude? Which of us has not felt that it is one thing to please a person as a duty, and another to please a person out of love? Which of us has not known the strange, the irresistible effect of a word of kindness, of a simple unstudied act of affection, from one whom we are conscious that we have injured? how it sometimes rolls away the whole barrier between us and him, makes us ashamed of our ill-temper, and (as St Paul says) heaps coals of fire upon our head? Even thus is it with the man whom God has forgiven; the man whom God visited when he was dead in his sins, and made him feel the full force of those words of blessing, *The Lord hath put away thy sin: thy sins are forgiven thee.* How did that man begin to enquire, *What reward can I give unto the Lord for all His benefits that He hath done unto me?* and answer himself, saying, *I will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord:* yea, I will love much, having been much forgiven.

But there may be some here present, who cannot understand the connection of the words, *Sent Him to bless you,* with the words, *in turning away each one of you from his iniquities.* They may

be saying, I know that my sins are wrong; and I can understand being required to part with them: but how can it be a blessing to give up this pleasant thing which sin is to me? That is, I well know, the honest though sad answer of some hearts this day. They think their sin is their happiness: at all events, they think they can have no other happiness. They count over to themselves the dull and toilsome hours of resistance, through which alone, they think, they can pass to victory; and they honestly confess that they are not equal to the effort: they are sorry for it, but it is so. O, my friend! let the question enter your heart to-night, *Does your sin make you happy?* Have you found the pleasure of sinning as great as its anticipation? Have you found the morning after sinning a bright and pleasant awakening? Have you never known what it was to curse the fetter which bound you, and to long (even without hoping) to be free? Have you not sometimes looked back upon a past and now unattractive sin with bitter remorse, with astonishment at your own infatuation? Then that experience has shown you what it would be to look back upon all sin, upon a life of sin, from a world where it will be too late ever to repent. A thing which has all these marks of misery upon it cannot be happiness. If there is any power or any Person, in earth or in heaven, who can set us free from this influence before it is too late, the coming of that power or that Person may indeed be said to be a blessing. Cost us what it may, it will be a blessing if it succeeds. And when that victory is wrought wholly through the power of love; through an assurance of free forgiveness; through the agency of an inward influence as sweet as it is constraining; how much more may it be so regarded. God grant that each one of us may know it for ourselves. God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sends Him to bless us, in turning away, not the world generally, but every one of us individually, from our iniquities. *Let Him bless us.* While others say of their sin, *When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again:* let our language be, *Thou of whose only gift it cometh that any man turns from his sin and is saved, O God, our own God, give us thy blessing.*

LECTURE IX.

THE FIRST TRIAL.

ACTS IV. 19, 20.

Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

THE two Apostles were still speaking to the people in Solomon's porch, when a forcible interruption occurred on the part of the national authorities. *The priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being indignant because of their teaching the people, and announcing in* (the case or person of) *Jesus the resurrection from among the dead.* It is again, as it was in their Master's case, a Jewish persecution. Even *the captain of the temple* was a Jewish, not a Roman, officer. *The servant is not greater than the Lord.* They who had despised and rejected the Lord, they who by the help of Gentile hands had wrought His death, will also hate and oppress the servant. So had He foretold, and now we are to find it true.

The immediate cause is given in the words, *And the Sadducees.* It appears from the following chapter that that sect was at this time dominant. And a sect which denied the resurrection, a sect of sceptics and materialists, was likely to resent a doctrine, and still more a fact, which contradicted their views on a point

so vital. The announcement of the resurrection even as a doctrine was offensive to them: but when the resurrection was announced (as it is here written) *in the case* or *person of Jesus*, announced as a fact which had already received its accomplishment, we can still less wonder at their rage and violence. *They laid their hands upon them, and got them placed in custody until the next day: for it was already evening.* The Apostles had come up to the temple at three o'clock in the afternoon: it was now, we may suppose, approaching sunset; and the night must intervene before their trial.

These are the same men who, but two months earlier, had been unable to stand their ground against the ridicule of a few maid-servants; the same men who had forsaken their Master and fled at the first approach of violence even to Him. Now they are bold to suffer for the truth's sake. *From weakness* they have been *made strong.* How do you account for this change? Men do not undergo rapid transformations of character by mere chance or by mere progress of time. How was it in this instance? If the Word of God is true, all is intelligible. They had in the interval received the Holy Ghost. They had been (according to their Lord's most true saying) *baptized with the Holy Ghost* ten days after His departure. The Christian can account for the change well enough. It is for the unbeliever to find where he can another and a better reason.

Though the two Apostles are in prison, *The word of God is not* therefore *bound. Many of those who had heard the word believed:* St Peter's second discourse, like the former, had brought in a large harvest of conviction and conversion: *and the number of the men was become about five thousand.* In the 1st chapter, *the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty.* In the 2nd chapter, *there were added unto them* in one day *about three thousand souls.* In the 4th chapter, *the number of the men* is already *about five thousand.* Wonderful tokens of the force of truth! Where is there anything corresponding to this progress of the Gospel now? And, if not—it is a grave and personal question—where shall we seek the cause?

Now we have to read of the first trial of the Christians; the first instance—and not the last—of that experience concerning which the same Apostle St Peter afterwards wrote, *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.* He who thus wrote had first acted; had first suffered himself as a Christian.

It came to pass that on the morrow there were gathered together, of them (the Jewish enemies of the Gospel), *the rulers, and the elders, and the scribes, in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the high priest's family; and having set them* (the two Apostles) *in the midst* of the judicial circle, *they enquired, In what power,* by the exercise of what sort of power, *or in what name,* in virtue of whose authority or commission, *did ye do this?* There is an emphasis: *ye,* two common men; ye, despised Galileans; ye, followers of a crucified Nazarene; how did ye get the power, whence did ye derive the commission, to work such a miracle? The fact was patent, and could not be challenged. But how and whence did ye derive the power?

Annas is spoken of as the high priest, whereas in the 18th chapter of St John's Gospel that title is given to Caiaphas. Annas is said to have been deposed by the Roman government, but still perhaps recognized by a part at least of the Jewish nation; so that the title of high priest might be given indifferently to his son-in-law and to himself.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost—not in His habitual indwelling only, but by a special communication for the emergency now arisen; according to the Lord's most true promise, *The Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say*—Peter, thus *filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day are examined with regard to a benefit of* (done to) *an infirm man, in whom,* by whose power or authority, *he has been saved,* rescued, that is, from his long suffering; *be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from among the dead, even*

in it (in virtue of that name) *doth this man stand here before you sound. This is the stone*, spoken of in the 118th Psalm, *which was set at nought*, made nothing of, despised and thought worthless, *by you the builders* there described, *which became unto* (was made) *the head of a corner*, the prominent and conspicuous feature in one of the principal angles of the building. That stone of which the Psalmist wrote, in your own Scriptures, as taken up and thrown aside by the builders as unworthy of being used at all in their work, but afterwards exalted into the foremost and most signal position of the whole building, that stone is Christ. He it was who came to His own, to be by them despised and rejected, but whom God has exalted as the Head over all things to the Church, yea, as the Possessor of all power in heaven and in earth, as King of kings and Lord of lords. *And there is not in any other that salvation* for which we look: *for neither is there another name under heaven, which hath been given among men, in which we must be saved.*

Such was the defence; brief, bold, and earnest. Impressive in itself, it was made yet more so by the position of the speaker. *Observing the boldness* (in speech) *of Peter and John, and finding that they were persons illiterate and ignorant, they marvelled, and recognized them*, if only by this very sign—by this combination of boldness of speech with humility of position—*that they were* (*as having been*) *with Jesus*, as His followers and His disciples. Of Him in like manner we read in St John's Gospel, that, when He *went up into the temple, and taught, the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* To be able to speak, with force and freedom, without an education, was a coincidence between Him and them which at once suggested the thought of connection and companionship. They recognized them as having been with Jesus.

It was not without embarrassment that they could deal with this case. On the one side, there was, as they would persuade themselves, a dangerous error; dangerous at least to their authority as masters in Israel. On the other side, there was an unquestioned fact: *seeing the man that had been healed*, and whose

case was so notorious, no longer lying at the temple gate, but *standing* erect *with them* (the Apostles), *they could say nothing against it.* So *they commanded them to depart,* or *go aside, out of the council, and conferred with each other, saying, What must we do in regard to these men? for that a known sign,* a notorious miracle, *has come to pass through them (by their means) is manifest to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it: but that it* (the mischief) *may not be spread further among the people, let us threaten them that they speak no longer to any man on the strength of this name. And they called them, and charged them not to speak (utter a sound) at all nor teach on the strength of the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, judge ye;* we leave you to judge: *for we are not able not to speak*—we, for our part, cannot refrain from speaking —*things which we saw and heard.* Those things of which our own eyes and ears were witnesses, we could not, even if we would, conceal.

Such grace was given to the first believers and champions of the faith in Christ. Their example, and their language, is in many respects most instructive.

1. First of all, we must observe, whether the fact be welcome to us or unwelcome, in what light the Apostles placed the offer of life which is in Christ Jesus. *Neither is there salvation in any other.* It is coming to be said, as well as thought, among Christian people, that the Gospel is at most but the highest and best of many forms of truth; that for those who can receive it it is well, it is perhaps best of all; but that those who cannot receive it may yet find an alternative both of rest and safety. And indeed, my brethren, it is no duty, but the very contrary, to spend our time in denouncing those who hear not or receive not Christ's Gospel. With ourselves is our concern. Those whom the sound of Christ's call has never reached; men who lived and died before His coming, or who in these days are as ignorant of His very name as if He had never come or never risen; must indeed be left—and well may they be left--

under the shelter of that all-embracing assurance, *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* We must not set ourselves in His judgment-seat, or presume to say more than that whatever is just He will do. Nor need we discuss the case, generally or individually, of those who have heard Christ's name, have appeared to seek after truth, and yet have never accepted the truth as it is in Him. There are doubtless malformations of mind as of body: disease has no law: again we say, There is One that knoweth and judgeth. But we dare not, as believers in Revelation, dispute or evade this certain fact; that Christ Himself, and His Apostles taught by His Spirit, declare that the Gospel is not one of many revelations, but the one and final revelation, of God's will and of God's truth; that, wherever the Gospel comes, *he that believeth is saved*, and on him that believeth not *the wrath of God abides;* in other words, that there is no salvation in any other save in Christ only. We are in danger of washing out the colour, and removing the landmarks, of Christianity, until it shall become impossible for any man to say why or even whence it came. We are in danger of so diluting the strength, and so softening the terms, of the faith once delivered to the saints, as to fall into that grave error, which our Church Article expressly condemns, of *presuming to say, that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature.* I fear that this has come to be the doctrine, or at least the feeling, of many members and even of some ministers of our own Church. And for ourselves, do we not all need the full stringency, the deep solemnity, of that truth which St Peter here enunciates before the Jewish council, *Neither is there salvation in any other?* For us, at all events, it is true. If we put away from us the Gospel offer, *to whom* else *shall we go?* If we cannot satisfy ourselves of Christ's mission or of Christ's work, where shall we find a hope strong enough to live by, firm enough to die upon? This is not a congregation of sceptics or philosophers, whose very learning forms a stumblingblock in the way of their believing: we are plain men; we are not embarrassed by the subtleties which

destroy the faith or poison the happiness of some: and I do say, that, if *we* are not Christians indeed, if we are dallying with Christ, if we are unconvinced and unconverted, *halting* still and to halt *between two opinions* on the vital truths of the Gospel, it is not because of its deficient evidences, it is not because it satisfies not our reason or commends not itself to the soul within, but it is because we are lying asleep in sin, it is because we are trifling, it is because we have other guests within and do not choose to dispossess them for the Saviour, it is because we are not yet convinced of the solemnity of life, or the fearful importance of the four words, judgment and eternity, hell and heaven. If St Peter's words could but be made audible in the depth of our hearts this night, *There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved*, there would be hope, there would be life, for us yet.

2. Again, we would leave with you those striking words, *They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.* They saw the boldness of Peter and John in their testimony for the truth; they found that they were unlearned and common men; and the strangeness of that combination seems to have reminded them of their Master; they recognized them, by this sign, as having been with Jesus. What a word is this for the time that is; for us, high and low, who are here assembled. There is not a man, or a woman, or a child, in this congregation, who may not be a witness for Christ in the selfsame manner. But most of all, the poorest; most of all, the youngest; most of all, the most ignorant and the most unlearned. Let men see you manful in your confession of Christ, let them see that you are not ashamed of Him; let them see that you claim and find the fulfilment of your Master's promise, that in every season of difficulty the Holy Ghost shall open your lips in courage and in wisdom; and assuredly they will know—for in this respect God never leaves Himself without witness—where you have been and in whose presence: the very *skin of the face* will *shine*, as of old in the Prophet and Lawgiver of Israel, from that heavenly converse, and men shall take knowledge of you, alike

by your meekness and by your boldness, that you have been with Jesus. Thus, not least, is His name made known below, His saving health among the fallen and the sinful.

3. Finally, let the words of the text itself speak to us in all their power, and become to us more and more the rule and guide of life. It has never happened to one of us to stand, as these Apostles stood, at the bar of an earthly judge, and be forbidden to speak at all in the name of Jesus. But there is a tribunal before which we are always standing; a tribunal below, and a tribunal above. The tribunal below is that of the world, whatever our world be; the tribunal of public opinion, in whatever way, or within whatever limits, public opinion acts for us. Those limits may be extremely narrow. There are those, possibly, here present, who know no human judgment-seat, practically, out of their own doors. The censure which we dread is oftentimes little more than that of brother or sister, wife or husband, parent or child. Our trial may be conducted entirely within the four walls of a parlour or a kitchen: no more formidable authority is that to which we are practically amenable. But which of us knows not, that, if this be all, there is a wonderful force and power in it? Many a life is lived day by day under a prohibition like that laid upon the two Apostles; Whether the Gospel be true or false, is not the question; whether Christ ever died and rose, whether Christ will ever judge, I care not; but this I say, You shall not speak to me or before me in Christ's name: I will not have the subject of religion mentioned in my hearing; nor will I suffer anything to be done in this house on the supposition that Christ lives and reigns, that Christ has commanded or that Christ will punish. That, when framed into words, is the condition of peace and quietness in many homes. That, when framed into words, is, more than we would willingly confess, the stipulation of much that is called society. We do not ask whether the Gospel be true: all we say is, the Gospel shall not be brought in here. Now you see from the example before us what we ought to be able to say in answer; what we ought to be able to act upon in the face of this proscription.

Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we heard and saw. Would to God that we could all speak thus decidedly as to the grounds of our own faith. Would that we could all say and all feel that in believing in Christ we are following no cunningly devised fable, but simply accepting truth on the evidence of fact. *That which was from the beginning,* says the same Apostle St John, *which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life...that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.* If this Gospel be thus proved and thus true, ought we not to confess it—not only when we meet to worship, but in daily life and daily speech? O for that spirit which breathed in the Apostles, when they said, We *cannot but speak.* They meant surely, Our hearts are full of these things, and they will utter them: if we would suppress, if we would conceal, if we would be silent, we could not. This is the faith which does Christ honour. This is the faith which makes converts. Not that cold calculating principle, which makes a dry and formal mention, in places and companies most unsuitable, of the words and phrases of the Bible; but rather that overflowing of the abundance of the heart, which is all natural, all genial, at once brave and modest, at once serious and cheerful, at once elevating and human. Yes, my brethren, in this as in all else we must begin at the source: out of the heart are the issues of life: first know Christ as your Saviour, and then let the light that is within shine forth into that which is without also.

There is a tribunal below: and there is another tribunal above. And these are contrary the one to the other—so that he who would satisfy both cannot. The one is seen and temporal; the other unseen but eternal. Who can doubt which of the two we ought to live for? Who, when the question is stated in words, would fail to reply, *We ought to obey God rather than man?* It cannot be right to hearken unto you more than unto God. And many of us, I doubt not, if sinners would entice them to an act of open wickedness, or if scoffers would

draw them into a direct denial of their Saviour, would have courage enough to give that answer. But not thus most often does the question reach us: not thus most often is the question answered. Not thus: but rather in a thousand demands for little daily compromises, no one of which seems of itself to touch the main issue between hearkening to the world and hearkening to God. The trial is ever proceeding; never, in this world, decided. Yet is it, in reality, for life or for death; and one day we shall all hear the verdict. God give us in that day a safe deliverance; that, having confessed Him here, He may confess us there, and make us glad for ever with the joy of His countenance.

LECTURE X.

PRIMITIVE WORSHIP.

ACTS IV. 31.

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

How far more perplexing, if we knew all, is the path of the sinner than the path of the just. If it is sometimes difficult, and sometimes dangerous, to serve God, yet, on the whole, it is a saving of trouble to have a single aim in life, and that single aim the right one. If once our question can become, What is true? and what is right? we avoid a thousand intricacies and a thousand embarrassments to which the worldly-minded and the double-minded are perpetually liable.

Mark the conduct of the Jewish rulers as it is set before us in the narrative last dwelt upon. They did not care to enquire whether by any possibility the disciples might be in the right; they did not attempt to dispute the fact of the recent miracle, nor to explain that fact on any hypothesis of their own: they only knew that their own authority depended upon upholding an existing system, and that a great sacrifice must be made if they would admit the Gospel to be true. And therefore they

determined not to admit the Gospel to be true. At all costs they would prop the present system.

But even this required caution. The people—the plain common men, who, when He was upon earth, had heard Jesus gladly—were all glorifying God for the miracle of healing which they had witnessed. Any punishment inflicted upon the Apostles would be unwelcome and unpopular. Thus the course of persecution itself by no means ran smooth. They might say, but they could not do: they might threaten, but they could not punish. They called the Apostles in, and charged them not to open their lips in the name of Jesus. And even the manful words of the two Apostles, leaving them to judge whether it could be right in God's sight to hearken to them more than to God, produced no impression: they only *further threatened them*, and then *let them go, finding no means of punishing them, because of the people.*

My brethren, if we would be happy men, or consistent men, or (in the long run) respected men, we must seek and love the truth. We must not ask, What is convenient? or what is advantageous? or what is popular? but, what is right? We must not say, I have a suspicion that there is something in this, but I dare not go through with it: or, I should like to do this or that, but I am afraid of what will be thought of it. We must simply ask, Does this commend itself to my judgment? is this ratified by my conscience? is this God's word or God's will? and then go boldly forward, assured that side-looks and by-ends and crooked paths are as miserable as they are wrong, and that, while *they who love God's law have great peace, they that run after another God shall have great trouble.*

Set in contrast with the half-measures and paltry misgivings of these scribes and elders, the noble courage and perfect peace of the now discharged and enfranchised prisoners.

Being released, they came to their own, to the other Apostles and Christians who were awaiting the issue of the imprisonment, *and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.* The questions asked, the charges laid upon them, the threatenings

added in case of disobedience, all were rehearsed in this friendly audience: and with what result? Was the question debated, whether, under circumstances so adverse, they could go forwards? Was anything said of *forsaking Christ and fleeing*, as they had done when He was Himself led to His trial? Was it proposed to enter into any compromise, such as that of leaving the city and carrying their new doctrine among the Gentiles? None of these things. Listen.

And they, when they heard, heard that danger was before them, heard that preaching was forbidden, heard that punishment would follow upon persistence, *with one accord lifted up their voice to God*, turned to Him in their peril, called to Him in their difficulty, confided to Him their anxieties and their distresses—yes, but in what tone? in the tone of fear and despondency, of misgiving and alarm? Listen once again. *They lifted up their voice with one accord to God, and said, Lord*—it is that word which expresses absolute ownership and sovereignty; the word by which a slave addresses his master, and the subject his sovereign; as though to remind themselves of that entire right and dominion over them which is the surest pledge of concern and guardianship —*Lord, Thou art He who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things that are in them;* all the creatures, rational or irrational, which inhabit each: see how the thought of the Creator comes in to support and comfort the redeemed. *Who by the mouth of Thy servant David didst say*, as we still read it month by month in our 2nd Psalm, *Why did nations boast themselves*—it is a figure taken from the neighing of spirited high-fed horses—*and peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth presented themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against His Christ;* against God Himself, and against the King whom He anointed, the King of kings and Lord of lords. We see now, they say, the fulfilment of this prophecy. *For there were gathered together, in truth, in this city, against Thy holy Servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint*, whom Thou didst make Thy Christ, *both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with nations and peoples of Israel, to do all things which Thy hand and*

Thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. So weak is man when he rises against his Maker. Even what he designs for evil is overruled for good. The description of one of these divine providences is the description of all; *As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* The murder of Jesus is the redemption of a world. *It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to Thy servants with all boldness to speak Thy word, in the stretching forth of Thy hand (while Thou stretchest forth Thy hand) for healing, and (grant) that signs and wonders may come to pass through the name of Thy holy Servant Jesus.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and all were filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness. God, at this moment of their need, gave a sensible sign of His presence: the place of assembly was shaken as by an earthquake: a new and special communication of the Holy Spirit both kindled and comforted their hearts, and they went forth, with added boldness, to the work of speaking and witnessing for God.

We have here, my brethren, an express record of a primitive meeting for worship. No doubt there was something in it of a special character. It was held at a moment of danger. The disciples were threatened with punishment if they dared to speak any more in the name of Jesus. There was that, therefore, in the circumstances of the moment, from which God's mercy has spared us. We come hither, week by week, to hear and to worship, *with all confidence, no man forbidding us.* Let us ask ourselves, Should we be here at all, were it otherwise? If we were *straitly threatened*, by the voice of the world around us, should we be bold to make answer, like these first disciples, that we *must* obey God rather than men? that we *could not but speak* and avow the things of which our heart was full? Alas, if the effect of persecution is to make the good better, the bold more bold, and the faithful more faithful, what is its effect upon the double-

minded and the half-hearted? Is it not, to make them fall away entirely, and walk no more, even by profession, with Jesus? I should tremble to see the effect of that fiery trial upon this congregation. Those of us who even in quiet times, when it is respectable to be a Christian, cannot conquer indolence, cannot forego inclination, cannot brave a smile or a sneer, in behalf of Christ; what would they do if the voice of the world turned (as it might turn) altogether against Christ; if even the profession of Christianity became a reproach? We half-Christians are afraid of one another: what should we be if the world turned against us?

If a season of excitement, like that through which these first Christians were passing, seems to us to account for the vigour and liveliness of their devotion, we ought to ask ourselves what effect such a season would have had upon *our* devotion; whether it would not have put it out and destroyed it altogether; whether even the worshippers themselves would have been forthcoming: and certainly our thanksgivings should arise to God for having spared us from so fiery a trial; for having permitted us to live in quiet times, when, if faith be less believing, and devotion less devoted, there is at least more of it; for the encouragement of the feeble, if not for the strengthening of the strong.

And then we ought to set ourselves, every one of us, to make our worship, when we assemble together in this place or elsewhere, as much like theirs as by God's grace we can. We shall look, therefore, at a few points in the example here set us.

1. When they heard that they were likely to have to suffer for Christ, even as He, their Lord and Master had forewarned them, *they lifted up their voice to God with one accord.* Not their heart only, but their voice. One said the words, but all echoed them. Some have called this the first example of a Creed. They have seen in it one of those joint utterances of a common faith, which our Church has prescribed to us, for example, in the Apostles' Creed. *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.* And they have

noticed that our own Church prescribes that the Creeds shall be *sung or said.* The Psalms themselves shall be *said or sung:* the Creeds shall be *sung or said;* as though the first notion of a Creed were that not of a confession of doctrine, but of a song of praise. According to this view, the first recorded worship of the Church was the singing of a Creed.

Others have seen in this specimen of primeval worship the proof of the existence of a Liturgy. They have said that, in order to lift up their voice to God in these words, they must first have known them. We will not enter into these arguments: they at least want certainty. It will be enough for us to observe, that, while one spoke, all followed: the well-known voice of St John or St Peter led—the thoughts were the thoughts of all, the words were simple and easy of apprehension—and they who, in that age of hearing, were accustomed to think aloud; they who, even when they were alone, like the Ethiopian Eunuch, were not seen but heard reading; found no difficulty in adding *a humble voice*, as well as *a pure heart*, to the words of supplication, *accompanying* the speaker *to the throne of the heavenly grace*, and *saying* the prayer *after* him. In this elementary point let us be earnest to resemble them. If the heart is engaged, the voice will not be withheld: you will rejoice to obey the call of your Church in such rules as these, *A general Confession to be said of the whole congregation after the Minister, all kneeling. The people shall answer here, and at the end of all other prayers, Amen. The Minister shall kneel, and say the Lord's Prayer with an audible voice; the people also kneeling, and repeating it with him, both here, and wheresoever else it is used in Divine Service. They lifted up their voice with one accord to God, and said.*

2. And now let us look at some of the particulars of this early Christian worship, that we may endeavour to frame our own after it.

(1) It is a *reverent* worship. How profound is the adoration of God as the alone Great and Good and Holy. How solemn is the sense of that rightful sovereignty over us and all things, which breathes in the first word and in the first clause of the

prayer! These men did not rush together as we do around the Divine footstool—talking, jesting, smiling, whispering—as though the visit were to an equal, or as though indeed the presence-chamber were empty. Let not such worship think that it can receive anything of the Lord. The least that can be looked for in this House of Prayer is reverence; the feeling of the sinful approaching the Sinless, the creature the Creator, the thing formed Him that formed it. Bending low before His footstool on our first entrance, let our one endeavour be to preserve, throughout, the solemnity of the opening, and to say, in manner as in word, *Lord, Thou art God.*

(2) Theirs was a *Scriptural* worship. They quoted Scripture in it. They recognized a Divine Inspiration in the voice of man. *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue. Who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said.* It is not essential to prayer that it be in Scripture words, but it is essential to prayer that it be founded on Scripture doctrine. It is essential that our petitions be addressed to God as He is, and not to God as we fancy Him. And we can only know God as He is, by becoming acquainted with Him in His Word. *There is verily a fault in us* in this matter. We are prone to imagine that we know God well enough of ourselves; that at all events we know God so well already from Scripture, that we have no occasion to study Him any more. And then we shut His Word, or read it but as a form, and lo, the living and true God is gone away, and He is no more with us. A name, a shadow, a phantom, is in His place. If we would pray aright, we must ask ourselves the question, *What is written? how readest thou?*

(3) Theirs was a *believing* worship. They rose above sight and sense, and could see behind forms of flesh and blood the Hand that moves the universe. Unbelieving men would have seen only *Herod and Pontius Pilate*, only *the Gentiles and the people of Israel*, banded together *against God and against His Christ.* They would have said, What are we against the world? That faith, that worship, that Church, which has to fight single-

handed *against principalities and powers* in earthly and *in heavenly places*, what chance, what hope, has it? But their eye was not thus bounded. Behind, amidst, above, all human agency for evil, they saw the hand of God working wholly for good. The murder of Jesus, what was it? In itself, a Satanic, a diabolical act: *this is your hour, and the power of darkness:* a calamity wrought by human prejudice and passion and cruelty: a thing in which there was nothing of God; only guilt, only crime, only sin. But in its consequences, what was it? The working out of God's counsel; the revelation of God's righteousness; the redemption of a world; the restoration and salvation of fallen man. You ask, how could man's sin thus redound to God's glory? You ask a question for which the time is not yet; a question which must wait its answer till the world beyond death. But, if you urge it as a difficulty in the way of the Gospel, we answer that it is at least as much a difficulty in the way of Providence as of Grace. God's will overruling man's will, and turning man's acts whither he would not; yet at the same time man free to will and free to act, and responsible alike for the willing and the acting; these are the conflicting elements with which we have to deal, and we must wait for their visible reconciliation in a time not yet come. Meanwhile the Christian could not live without this confidence, that all things are working together for the glory of God, and for good to them that love Him. The prayer of the Christian is a believing prayer; because he can add to every mention before God of things calamitous and evil which befall him, *For to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done.*

(4) Theirs was also a *practical* worship. It dealt not with feeling but with action; or, if with feeling, only in so far as right and pious feeling is the soul of holy and Christian action. If they called upon God to *behold the threatenings* of the enemy, it was in this connection; that He might grant to His servants the needful grace to stand against them. It is a great matter when our prayers have a practical object. We are too ready to let them stop with themselves; to be satisfied if a ray of comfort,

if a passing thought of peace, if a feeling of reconcilement and of affiance, is left behind them; to regard them only as soothers of the conscience or enliveners of the affections. And therefore they are this only. We *have our reward*, even as we prescribed it. But that was not the aim of the worship here before us. The worshippers of whom we here read looked to conduct, looked to duty, looked to future trials of their faith and constancy, and asked for grace sufficient to each of these. In the prospect of *affliction and persecution for the Word's sake*, they pray that they may not be offended; that faith may not fail, nor courage, nor constancy, nor energy; that they may still *speak boldly, as they ought to speak*. For this purpose, to quicken this zeal, to strengthen this devotion, they pray that God's hand may still be outstretched to heal; that He will never leave them without witness, but will give them daily proof that His holy Servant Jesus is indeed strong to help, mighty to save. My brethren, we ought in prayer to forecast the future. We ought to bethink ourselves of coming trial; and while we trust God implicitly with the unforeseen, to ask His help expressly for that which we can see before us. One word of definite request is worth volumes of vague general aspirations. First, in itself; because it is real, because it means something; because it is the address of a living man to a living God on a topic which concerns life. And secondly, in its effects; because one thing actually granted is a proof of being heard; because it is God's own witness to His own grace; because it is a *token for good*, shown and proved, encouraging confidence in Him who is not only the Giver of single blessings, but the Fountain of all goodness, and the very source of life.

3. We have spoken of the manner of the primitive worship, and of its nature. One concluding word must be given to its effects.

An immediate sign followed it. *The place was shaken where they were gathered together*. These things are of the past. These things were suitable then, and necessary. Men looked for outward signs; and they wanted them, while the faith was

young. *These signs shall follow them that believe;* and the spiritual was an inference from the sensible. In this age, there is no outward sign which scepticism could not account for: signs would not convince the infidel, and the believing ask not for them. But has God, then, no sign for His people? Has worship no sign of its acceptance? Is there nothing now corresponding to the altar-flame which attested God's regard to man's offering? Yes, there is an inward peace following upon Divine communion: there is a glow of faith, and a comfort of love, and a joy of hope, by which *the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are sons of God.* He who seeks God with all his heart, on any occasion of worship, shall find Him, and know that he finds: he shall feel it *good for him to be here*, and he shall be sent on his way rejoicing. *Filled with the Holy Ghost*, by a conscious communication between his soul and God, he shall go forth hence to *speak the word of God with* added *boldness;* to bear a more manful and a more consistent testimony to that message of the Gospel which Jesus Christ brought down from heaven, and which He sealed with the outpouring of His most precious blood.

i. Expect, my brethren, great things from worship. Worship will be, in great measure, what you make it; what you make it in your use, what you make it in your expectation. If you look for much, you will also receive much: if you expect little, you will also reap little. *Ye are not straitened in* God: *ye are straitened in your own* affections. *Open thy mouth wide*, He says, *and I will fill it.*

ii. Finally, carry your worshipping thoughts forth with you. Let them not be dissipated by idle words, by foolish levity, just outside or (alas, it may be) even within these walls. The great enemy will watch you after this Service, that he may *catch away* the seed sown: even *among the sons of God* (one Book of Holy Scripture tells us) he comes and goes freely: *we are not ignorant of his devices.* Look upward to Him who is greater than the evil one, and can counterwork all his wiles. Pray that the good thoughts here suggested, and the holy desires here fostered, may live in you this night, to-morrow, and through the days to come.

Desire the sincere milk of the Word, not that ye may trifle with it, but *that ye may grow thereby. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.* Yea, may He Himself, who is the Word, so abide in us by His Spirit, that we may know Him for ourselves; first as the Life of the living, and hereafter as the Resurrection of the dead.

LECTURE XI.

THE FIRST SIN.

ACTS V. 1.

A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife.

THERE is an old saying, *The corruption of the best is worst.* The better a thing is, the worse is its spoiling. The greater the elevation, the greater the fall.

And this is true both of profession and of reality. When a man who has talked loudly is at length unmasked as an impostor, his exposure is more terrible than if he had never affected great virtue. And when a man who has not only professed but felt the truth and power of religion is, as, alas, he may be, overtaken by the enemy and overcome, it is sometimes found that he gives himself over more entirely to the grasp of evil than one who had never known what it was to serve another master. *If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*

Our subject this evening brings before us the first great sin committed within the Christian Church; shows us how it *took occasion* from the very devotedness and self-sacrifice of the first Christians; proves to us how very low a man may fall, who has once risen very high in Christian attainment; warns us that we

must never presume upon the advantage even of Christian companionship, of being entirely surrounded by Christian characters, as a safeguard against temptation or sin; and, in short, bids us, by a very serious example, lay well to heart the Apostle's warning, *Be not high-minded but fear: Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* We look upon this scene almost as we look upon man's original Fall: we seem to be reading of a Paradise regained, when we are suddenly shocked and startled by the narrative of a Paradise for the second time forfeited.

For what indeed can be more like a description of a Paradise below, than that which closes the last chapter and introduces this? The deep impression made by the act of worship of which we last read, was no fleeting or evanescent feeling. *The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul* (*had their heart and their soul one*): their union was not, as is too often the case now, formal and nominal; not the connection of those who with the same voice can first *bless God* and then *curse man;* can kneel together in the House of Prayer, and then go forth to dispute and wrangle, to disparage and to defame: they had one heart and soul. *And no one said that any one of those things which belonged to him was his own, but they had all things common.* Instead of standing up for individual rights, and going to law (if need be) one with another to keep or to reclaim, they regarded all they had as belonging equally to their brethren. For a time this was so in that happy congregation: and even when the form was changed, the spirit continued. Alas, where is either the form or the spirit now?

And with great power the Apostles rendered the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; presented before the world *the subject of their testimony*, the thing which they had to testify, *concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all;* God's favour and blessing was largely bestowed upon the whole community. And one decisive proof of this is added. *For neither was there among them any needy person:* the words express that even the charity of the Church was anticipated, as it were, by the disappearance of poverty: *there was*

not indeed any one that lacked: there was no room for giving, because all were supplied—in the manner next described. *For as many as were beforehand possessors of farms or houses sold them, and brought,* one after another, *the prices of the things sold, and laid them at the feet of the Apostles: and distribution was made to each, according as any one had need. And Joseph, who was surnamed Barnabas on the part of the Apostles; which is when interpreted, Son of encouragement;* that is, one to whom God has given by His Holy Spirit a singular power of *cheering on* others in the way of eternal life; *a Levite, a Cyprian by family;* one descended from the tribe of Levi, but whose family lived in the island of Cyprus; *having a field belonging to him, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the feet of the Apostles.* There was an example of a genuine exercise of that self-devotion which has been noticed.

And now we turn to its counterfeit. We are to see how the great enemy, *while men slept, came and sowed tares among the wheat.*

But a man, Ananias by name, together with Sapphira his wife—the two acted jointly in this business—*sold a possession, and appropriated* a part *from the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the feet of the Apostles. And Peter said, Ananias, why did Satan fill thine heart, that thou shouldest deceive the Holy Spirit,* that thou shouldest lie to those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells for the very purpose of guiding and ruling the Church of God, *and that thou shouldest appropriate* a part *from the price of the farm? While it remained, remained it not for thee?* so long as it was unsold, was it not thine own? *and, when sold, was it not (from the first) in thine own authority?* There was no compulsion to sell; no rule of the Church required it: and after selling, the money got by it was liable to no dictation from the Church as to its use: all was voluntary; to sell or not to sell; to give or not to give; to give a part or to give the whole: but not to give a part and pretend that it was the whole; not to deceive, in a matter of piety and of charity; not to treat the living and heart-searching God as if He

were *even such an one* as the creatures whom He hath made. *Why* is it *that thou didst set this deed in thine heart*, give this wicked device room and lodgment within thee? *thou didst not lie to men, but to God.* The falsehood was not only to men: perhaps it was not even uttered in words: but it was a lie in God's sight, and it had special relation to God's matters.

And Ananias, as he heard these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost: and there came great fear upon all who heard; upon all who were present and heard that which passed. *And the younger men* present in the assembly *rose up, and wrapped him up* in his garments, *and bore him forth and buried him.*

And there was an interval of about three hours, and then *his wife, as not knowing* (*because she knew not*) *what had taken place, came in* to the place where the congregation was still assembled, in all the awe attending that terrible scene. *And Peter answered her*, answered her first word or thought of enquiry as to the scene before her or the looks with which she was received, *Tell me whether ye sold the farm for so much?* naming the sum paid in by her husband. *And she said, Yes, for so much.* She adhered to the falsehood, and made it her own. *And Peter said to her, Why* is it *that it was agreed between you to tempt the Spirit of the Lord;* to try an experiment upon the discernment, upon the penetration, of the Holy Spirit of God; to see whether He could and would unveil your hypocrisy, and visit your sin upon you? *Behold, the feet of those who buried thy husband* are *at the door, and shall bear forth thee. And she fell down instantly at his feet, and gave up the ghost: and the young men came in and found her dead, and bore her forth and buried her by her husband. And there came a great fear upon the whole of the Church, and upon all who heard these things.*

Such is the history of the first entrance of sin into the Christian community. And in reading it, observe,

1. There is such a thing as acting a falsehood. I do not read here that Ananias expressly said that the sum he brought was the whole price of his land. The question was distinctly put to his wife, and she answered it by an express falsehood.

But of Ananias we seem rather to read that he brought a certain sum, and *gave it to be understood* that that sum was the whole sum received. We have to do with a God of truth; and where truth is not, there in His sight is falsehood. We often guard and fence our words, so that they shall be just susceptible of an interpretation consistent with the fact. We often think that, if we can avoid saying the exact opposite of the truth, it is enough: we cannot be guilty of falsehood, unless in so many words we tell a direct lie. Learn then that, wherever deception is, there is falsehood. Wherever the natural inference from our words would be this or that which is not the case, there in God's sight is the sin of lying. And how many of our words are of this character; 'an attempt to steer dexterously between the truth and a lie.' Let us lay it well to heart that we are in the presence of One who sees and knows all things, and who will hereafter bring every word and every thought into judgment.

But, even beyond this, there may be an acted falsehood. Ananias, witnessing the honest self-devotion of others in throwing all they possessed into the treasury of Christ, determines to win for himself the same character. He too will seem to have *counted all things but loss for Christ.* He gives it to be understood that he is parting with his land out of zeal for the Gospel. The sale is in private; but soon he appears in the congregation with the bag of gold or silver, which he takes care should be understood to be the produce, and the whole produce, of the transaction. Just as Barnabas of Cyprus brought the profits of his sale of land, so does Ananias bring his. Every one gives him credit, and he intends that they should do so, for a devotion which thinks only of things above, and a self-forgetfulness which cannot enjoy so long as others suffer. No word, it may be, is spoken: but the act itself says all this, and the doer intends that all this should be understood. It is then, in the midst of that acted lie, that the light of God's countenance is fully let in upon the secret misdeed. And terrible indeed to the hypocrite must have been that searching, that unanswerable question, *Ananias, why hath Satan filled*

thine heart, to lie unto the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

Alas, how much of the conduct of many of us is indeed no better than an acted lie. How much is done to throw dust into the eyes of others as to our real motive, as to our real self. O what would become of our piety, and what would become of our charity, if God were to throw upon it, in the sight of our fellow-men, the light of His Omniscient eye? Even apart from the positive wish and purpose of deceiving, how impossible it is to give others a true and just idea of us as we are. How does confession itself turn upon our lips into self-parade and boasting. How must we all consent, whether we will or no, to go about among our fellows rather masked than open. It is so, perhaps, in mercy to others even more than to ourselves. We might draw others downwards, if they saw how low are our own attainments: we might tempt them to acquiesce in imperfections against which God would have them struggle on in hope. But, if this be so to a certain extent inevitably, let us take good heed not to multiply, not to exaggerate, and not to love, this misconception. There is all the difference, in God's sight, between him whom men will overestimate in spite of his sincerity, and him who forces men to overestimate him by his concealments and by his hypocrisies. God save us all from the falsehood of the tongue, and from the falsehood of the life; from the lie acted, as well as from the lie spoken.

2. What an illustration have we here of the saying of the Apostle, *The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* What was it which made Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Ghost? Was it not the lust of money? Was it not the wish to save something out of the surrender of their all to Christ? Was it not the desire, if not to get, at least to keep, a fragment of that perishable money which at the very moment they were professing to cast away? Thus it was that Ananias and Sapphira lost both worlds; even by trying to gain both. They would be pious, they would be

charitable, they would serve Christ, they would do good to man: but they kept a corner in their hearts for Mammon: they trusted Christ would not notice it: they felt sure that He must be satisfied with what they gave Him; that He could not grudge that slight, that small reservation: had they not sold their all? had they not given Him all but their all? would not that suffice? could they be blamed for making some little provision against a change of times? was it much to ask, that they might keep back just this little? Thus it was that in their hearts the little dark spot grew and spread and darkened still, until it overshadowed and at last poisoned all the rest. They lost both worlds in the very act of gaining both.

My friends, the Scripture is very full—to some of us almost unintelligibly, almost disproportionately full—of warnings about the love of money. Judas himself, the traitor Apostle, was a victim to the love of money: and O of such money! of such little, paltry, despicable sums as we should scarcely stoop to pick up. It is not the amount, which makes the attraction. There are men on earth, who will 'contrive the gain of a farthing:' they like the scheming, and the ingenuity, and the adroitness, which the love of money in any shape demands and exercises: and it grows upon them till the very heart is eaten out by it.

Ananias lost life and soul together for the sake of gaining even from himself. He might have kept all: but he wanted to give all and yet to keep back a part: and the Spirit of God found him out in doing so. I would speak with all tenderness: but is there a place in which the word of warning is more needful, or a time at which it could be more seasonable? What is it but the love of money which creates some of the most characteristic evils of a town like this? I speak not now of that honest, honourable, honoured industry in the business of a lawful calling, which is as much the duty as it ever can be the interest of a Christian. Would to God there were more amongst us of the love of money in this one Christian sense; more, I mean, of that quiet, steady plodding in the work of the shop or of the office, by which a competence, with God's blessing upon it, is gradually acquired,

and handed down to those that come after. I speak, and your own hearts go along with me in speaking, of those precarious, those adventurous, those idle methods of gaining, upon which God's blessing cannot be asked, and upon which (it is scarcely an exaggeration to say) God's curse almost visibly rests. I speak of wants created by an expenditure habitually exceeding income, and supplied by the exorbitant profits of a single week in the year. I speak of examples set to the young of unlawful ventures, by which many a life has been drawn astray from the beginning, and many a hopeful career cut short by crime and infamy. I speak of a love of gain, which has made sons indifferent to a father's command and a mother's happiness, reckless in destroying the inheritance of sisters, and at last regardless even of a country's laws and the terrors of a wrath to come. These things have been, over and over again: the records of our courts of justice are full of them: and earnestly and affectionately would I warn those who hear me—the younger part, more especially, of this congregation—of the fearful risks run by the first step into the region of chance; the first departure from that safe and pleasant path of Christian diligence and uprightness, on which alone God's blessing rests, and to which alone the promise belongs, *Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing which is right: for that shall bring a man peace at the last.*

3. What a responsibility is involved in being brought near to God as members of His Son's Church below. Well may this be recorded as the consequence of the fate of Ananias, that *great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things.* Yes, there is a reality in our connection with Christ, which must tell upon us for good or else for evil. These ordinances of which we make so light; these means of grace, these opportunities of worship; the very sacrament of Christian Baptism, in which all of us, singly and severally, have been dedicated and devoted to God through Jesus Christ; all these things have a meaning, whether we will or no, and we ourselves are *fearfully and wonderfully* concerned in it. We cannot get out of that presence. We must spend our lives, we must think

our thoughts, speak our words, and do our acts, in the sight and hearing of that God who has made us His own by the gift of His Son. It is in vain that we say, *We will be as the heathen.* God has set His mark upon us; God has taken us for His people, and, either in love, or else *in fury poured out*, He must *rule over us.* I can desire nothing more for you and for myself, beloved brethren, than that this thought might be deeply graven upon our hearts. We are so light, so giddy, so trifling; or else we are so selfwilled, so presumptuous, so audacious; in either case, we are so independent of God and of His will, in our own eyes; that it would revolutionize the very life of all of us if we could only begin to live it as in God's presence; if we could only say to ourselves, and live and move daily in the recollection of it, *I speak and act not unto men, but unto God;* my faults, my sins, are all not only open to Him, but done in relation to Him; *Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified in Thy saying, and be clear when Thou judgest.* In the prospect of abounding temptations, for some of those who hear me, in the week which today opens, I could be satisfied, I could be secure, for the stability of any one who will only *set God always before him*, commit to Him his ways and his doings, and say to Him, night and day, in the sincerity of his heart, *Thou art near, O Lord: Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.*

4. Finally, let us learn by God's grace, from the history now before us, the great practical lesson, how to cast out the fear of one another by the stronger and more impressive fear of God. Ananias and Sapphira committed this great sin in the hope of purchasing to themselves the good opinion of the Christian congregation to which they belonged. And they would have succeeded in this endeavour, but for one consideration which they left out of sight. They would have succeeded in winning the esteem of man, if they could only have kept God silent. If God would but acquiesce, if God would but keep silence, they could have done all. But God thought it necessary to show that young Church, that He was in them and among them of a truth.

He saw fit to impress upon them all, by a terrible proof, the fact that He has not deserted the earth, however much the earth may set aside or forget Him. And the fearful fate of these two persons made, as it well might make, a strong and salutary impression upon the hearts of His people. They saw then that to be brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ does not imply any impunity in sinning. It does not mean that God's holiness is one whit less perfect, or His judgment one whit less strict, on account of the atonement which He has made for all sin in the sacrifice of Jesus. He who will trifle with God, he who will tempt the Holy Ghost, by continuing in sin, or by deliberately cherishing in his heart the desire of some forbidden thing, shows thereby that he is *counting the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing*, and that he has *neither part nor lot* in that salvation which is as much *unto holiness* as it is all *of grace*.

And we also are daily tempted to live for the honour which comes to us from one another, and not for that honour which is of God only. When shall we begin to care more for the approval of Christ, than for the approval of men that shall die? When shall we give up this fatal habit, of asking, at each turn, What does the world say? what does the world do? my world, I mean; the world of my family, my friends, my neighbourhood; and enquire rather, Is this right? does Christ approve? if I go there, shall I be throwing myself into temptation? if I enter into this amusement, shall I not be risking the falling again into that old snare in which I was once and for so long entangled? Let me look up to Christ for direction. Let me ask Him to guide. Let the whisper of His Spirit be my voice of admonition. And let me in all things *thank the Lord for giving me warning*. Let me count it no hardship, but the highest honour, the purest joy, to have the Lord so near me that, when I would do this, He Himself shall say to me, Do it not. Do it not—why? Because He grudges me enjoyment? because He would have me dull and spiritless and fainthearted? Nay, but because He loves me; because, giving me Himself, He gives me all; because, having

shed His own blood for me, He may be trusted with my all; and because He has Himself promised me, that, where He is, there at last shall I His servant be.

May He thus draw us to Himself *with the cords of a man, even with the bands of love. In His presence*, even now, *is fulness of joy.* Let us not forfeit that joy, for the sake of any other. Let us be assured that whatever draws us another way must be our misery. But, above all, even if we must suffer for Him; even if friends shall look coldly on us, or the whole world deride and pass us by; still it must be well with us, if we are His. May He give us grace to make that choice, and to abide by it, and to find it more and more our chief and our one happiness; so that at last we may understand all that is included in the words written of old by one in whom the Spirit of God was, *The Lord Himself is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup... He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall.. Thou shalt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is the fulness of joy: and at Thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.*

LECTURE XII.

FOUR CHARACTERS.

ACTS v. 41, 42.

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

TIMES of trial are also not seldom times of triumph. What we ought to dread above all things, as Christians, is stagnation; a condition, within or without, of indolent quiescence and suspended animation. It would be far better that the worshippers in this Church should come together through the taunts and sneers of a scoffing populace, and go hence to stand oftentimes alone in their testimony for the truth amidst friends and relatives, than that they frequented God's house because it was customary and fashionable to do so, and were marked by no difference and no singularity in their confession of Christ at home. The truth is, a fallen world can never be a resting world. If there is no struggle, there can be no victory: if there is no suffering for the Gospel, there will be no earnestness in its cause and no experience of its power.

Mark, in this aspect, the scene here presented for our contemplation. See what the Gospel was, while it was still fresh

and young. See how it wrought; how it fermented, like leaven, in the society into which it was first thrown; how it made common men, who had but a few days before received it into their hearts, bold to speak and strong to suffer. O for something of the same faith and of the same zeal in these cold hearts and these sluggish lives of ours!

The Church, that is, the company and congregation of the faithful, had received a startling proof of the nearness of God to them, and of the perilous responsibility involved in being a Christian. It is indeed playing with edge-tools to be a worshipper or a believer by halves. First to draw nigh to God in sacraments and services, and then to trifle with Him; first to profess to believe in a heart-searching God, and then to try experiments upon His penetration; this is a fearful risk indeed. This is what Ananias and Sapphira dared to do; and their awful history is told in Scripture for the admonition and warning of every later and latest age. That was a picture of the Church from its inner side; of the Christian body in its relation to Christ its Head. And now we are to view again its outer aspect; towards the world that looked on; and looked on with varied feelings, of respectful awe, of admiring gratitude, of bitter hostility, or of candid observation.

By means of the hands of the Apostles many signs and wonders took place among the people. A *wonder*, or *miracle*, is a simple surprise; something out of the course of nature, as we speak: a *sign* or *signal* is a wonder which points to something; a departure from the course of nature which intends to call attention to a hand or to a person out of sight. All the Christian miracles are signs also. *And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch:* that was the mustering place, the head quarters, of the community, in public. *And of the rest*, of those who did not yet believe, *no one presumed to attach himself to them.* A sort of sanctity hung visibly about them, which warned off idle intrusion. It was not, as now, that whoever was nothing else called himself a Christian; or that people could come and go to the Christian's assembly and to the Christian's worship unquestioned and unchallenged: there

was a meaning then, a felt meaning, in the profession of faith; and the recent example of Divine severity, the exposure and the fate of two pretenders, two intruders into the camp of the saints, added doubtless, to that awe which, like the pillar of fire and cloud in the Exodus, separated between the army of Israel and the host of Egypt.

No one presumed to attach himself to them without believing: *but the people magnified them;* the common people paid them all reverence and honour: *and more* even than before *were there* constantly *being added* to them *persons believing on the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.*

There was a general impression of the power and of the beneficence of the new faith and its professors; *so that even into the streets people carried out the sick and placed them upon couches and beds, that, as Peter came* along, *even his shadow might overshadow some one of them.* Like the believing touch of our Lord's garment, the lying for a moment under Peter's shadow sometimes availed for restoration where there was the mind of faith. It needed not a touch, it needed not a word; it was enough if the very shadow rested upon the sick man as the great Apostle went by. It was not necessary, if God was pleased to work, that He should work in this mode rather than in that: the touch was but a sign, the word was but an indication, of the outcoming of the healing virtue: it was not necessary that either should be employed: the shadow, if He wills, may do as well. *And there came together also* daily *the multitude* (*population*) *of the cities round Jerusalem, carrying sick persons and any troubled* (*molested*) *by unclean spirits; who were healed all of them.*

Such an excitement could not but attract the renewed attention of the enemies of the Gospel. *The high priest rose up,* prepared himself for an act of vigour, *and all who were with him,* his assessors and advisers, *that which is the party of the Sadducees* —these deniers of spirit and of the resurrection were then in the ascendant—*and were filled with jealousy* at the success of the new religion, *and laid their hands on the Apostles, and got them placed in public custody. But an angel of the Lord by* (*in the course*

of the) night opened the doors of the prison, and led them out, and said, Go, and taking your stand in the temple speak to the people all the words of this life; of this heavenly, this eternal life, with the announcement of which you are charged. *And when they heard* this, *they entered at daybreak into the temple, and began to teach. And the high priest, having arrived* at the usual place of meeting—in a hall (it is said) adjoining the great gate of the Temple—*and they that were with him, called together the council, and all the elderhood of the sons of Israel*—the assembly known as the Sanhedrin, or religious council of the seventy elders—*and sent to the prison for them to be brought. And the officers that came* there *found them not in the prison; and they returned and reported, saying, The prison-house we found closed,* locked and barred, *in all security, and the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened it we found no one within. And when both the captain of the temple*—the Jewish officer who commanded the Levitical guard—*and the chief priests,* the heads and leaders of the priestly body, *heard these words, they were at a loss concerning them what this thing might become,* to what result all this might come. *And some one arrived, and reported to them, Behold, the men whom ye caused to be placed in the prison, are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then the captain* of the temple *departed with the officers, and brought them, not with violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned; and they brought them, and set them in (before) the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach on the ground of this name; and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and wish to bring upon us the blood of this man. But Peter answered, and the Apostles, and said, We must obey God rather than men.* If He lays a charge upon us, we must fulfil it, come what may. *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye dispatched by hanging Him on a tree: Him did God exalt as a Prince and a Saviour by (with) His own right hand,* by the exercise of His Almighty power, *to give repentance to Israel and dismissal of sins. And we are witnesses of these words,* of the truth of these facts, *and the Holy Spirit* also,

whom God gave to those who obey Him. The descent of the Holy Ghost on the great day of Pentecost was God's own witness borne along with the human evidence of things actually seen and known.

And they when they heard were cut to the heart—literally, *were sawn asunder*, as it were, by the violence of their rage and fury—*and they wished to slay them. But there rose one in the council, a Pharisee, by name Gamaliel*—and we all recognize the name as that of the instructor in early days of St Paul himself—*a teacher of the law, honourable in the judgment of all the people, and urged them to put the men out for a short time*, that the discussion might be more freely carried on; *and*, when this was done, *said to them, Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves with regard to these men what ye are about to do.* This is, in one sense, not the first case of the kind, with which you have had to deal. Some time ago there was Theudas, a man of large professions, who collected a body of four hundred followers, and you saw what it all came to: he was put to death, and his party dispersed and annihilated. Then there was Judas of Galilee—the same thing again—first a brief success, and then utter ruin. Therefore I counsel calmer measures. *Refrain from these men: let them alone.* If their plans and their proceedings are of men only, depend upon it, the enterprise will come to a natural end: it will meet the fate of all human enterprises against law and order. But if it should so happen, that in this one instance we have a work of God to deal with, all your efforts to put it down will be in vain; and you must take good care lest, in opposing it, you should be found to be fighting against God. The weight of a great name, and (we may well suppose) the manifest wisdom of the counsel itself, prevailed over prejudice and exasperation. *They obeyed him, and calling the Apostles in they beat them*—though uncondemned, though virtually acquitted by their judges, they must still (like their Master before them) be put to this pain and ignominy—*and* then *charged them not to speak on the ground of the name of Jesus, and released them. They then went their way rejoicing from the presence of the council, because they were deemed worthy to be*

disgraced in behalf of the Name, the great and sacred Name of their beloved Lord: *and throughout every day, in the temple, and at home, they ceased not to teach and to proclaim the glad tidings of the Christ* as being *Jesus;* as having come in the person of Jesus; to declare one to another, and in the hearing of Israel, that the Messiah, promised of old, was come, and come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, first crucified, now risen. *We have found Him, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*

The use which I would make of the passage thus summarily glanced at, is as an exhibition of various characters by which we may test and judge our own.

1. And first, there is the character of the chief priests and elders; faithful still to their conduct towards Christ Himself; persecuting the servant as they before had persecuted the Lord. One new feature there is in this persecution. It is, more distinctly than in the Gospels, a Sadducean hostility. Among the impugners of our Lord's own doctrine the Pharisee is unquestionably the more conspicuous: the severest words of all uttered by the Saviour are directed against the Pharisee; it is he who is ever at hand *to catch something out of His mouth;* it is he whose hypocrisy of heart made him dread Christ's discernment and Christ's holiness, and whose very orthodoxy on some vital points of doctrine gave a self-sufficiency to his judgment peculiarly unfavourable to the real reception of the truth. But no sooner has Christ left the earth than the opposite party rises into more prominence as assailants of His Gospel. And most natural it was that a Gospel built upon a resurrection should irritate most strongly the sect which denied that great hope of man. While it was a mere tenet of doctrine, they bore it with composure: when it became a statement of fact, it was at once a struggle for life and death. Thus there were occasions, of which this book in its later chapters will tell, when the Pharisee, confessing the resurrection, lends his aid to the faith which is suffering in that behalf. And great as were the faults of the Pharisee, severe as his condemnation was from the lips of Him who is truth, he had yet

in some respects a shorter path to traverse if once his steps should be turned in the direction of Christ's kingdom. The Sadducee was a cold, scoffing, irreligious materialist. It would be an affront to any sect within the Christian Church to compare it with such a model. Nevertheless if there be a body of professed Christians who seek to divest the Gospel of all its supernatural character; who cut out of it every element of Divinity, whether in the form of miracle or of inspiration; who resolve its whole system of duty into respectability rather than holiness of conduct, and good nature rather than charity towards other men; who practically make their nest here, and leave out of sight, while they may, the revelation of a world to come; then that body is the type, imperfect but real, of the Sadducee of other days: and those who have seen anything, in detail, of the working of that spirit in men who call themselves Christians, will be at no loss to understand how the Sadducee should outrun even the Pharisee in the bitterness of his hostility to all that is distinctive and characteristic in the Gospel.

Nor need we look to other sects or other Churches for examples of enmity to the cross of Christ. The spirit of the Sadducee is in all of us by nature, struggling in us for the mastery with that of the Pharisee and the Herodian. Each one of these is but the developement of one attribute of fallen nature. What is the Sadducee but the man who avows his disbelief in mysteries of which we all have too feeble a grasp? I might ask, which of us has a firm hold of those particular revelations, the denial of which would make a Sadducee of him by profession? Which of us really and truly expects the resurrection, or can say with any consistency in the words of our Creed, *I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come?* And if the best of us rather gropes amidst these things in the dark than walks among them as in the light of perfect day, what shall we say of those who have accustomed themselves to treat everything lightly till nothing is serious, nothing is grave to them; who have a jest ready for every revelation, and a scoff for every demand of duty, till at length they can neither tremble at

God's terrors nor believe in God's love? O the bitterness of the scoffer, towards one who possesses a hope which he has flung away! O the acrimony with which he exposes a weakness, and watches for a fall, in one of Christ's servants! These things are not of the past: they are of the present. The Sadducees of our day do not gather themselves together in council and conclave, to try and to judge the disciples of the Lord: they themselves use the same name, and would be indignant at the denial of the title. But they hate, none the less, and they disparage, and they persecute too, those who truly believe; point at them as ignorant, as old-fashioned, as righteous overmuch, as slaves of the letter, as exclusive and positive and self-sufficient; and many a life is embittered still, many a heart is disquieted and dejected, many a man feels himself an alien and an outcast from the society which he loves and the sympathies for which he yearns, because he will take Christ at His word, and will live and die in the faith as it was once delivered to the saints. The persecutors of the Christian are amongst us still, and oftentimes they are persecutors in conduct because they are first Sadducees in spirit. May such persons, if any such there be amongst us, ask themselves seriously this one question, Am I certain that I shall never want Christ myself; want Him in loneliness and sorrow, want Him in age and sickness, want Him in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment? If I know not this, and know it not for certain, let me take heed how I now make it impossible that I should ever seek Him then.

2. And when we turn from this extreme of hostility to the cause of Christ, through the various stages which separate it from an entire devotion, are we not struck with the existence in these days of many a Gamaliel; of many a man who is at once observant and candid, anxious to do nothing rashly, waiting, rather, to examine credentials, or even to see the end, before he pronounces himself decisively either for or against the Gospel? These men have much in them that is attractive, and at first sight all that is reasonable. What can we desire more, we are ready to ask, than that a person be open-minded and calmly judging; an

adviser of caution, a hater of precipitation, in decisions for eternity; a man reminding the powerful of the rights of the humble, and the prejudiced of the supremacy of truth? What but good can come, we might enquire, of that prudent and sensible reminder, in a time of religious excitement and enthusiasm, *If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, and see lest haply ye be found even to fight against God?* O for a voice, we say, so calm and so judicial, to mediate and to moderate in the dissensions of party zeal! And no doubt such a voice is useful; useful in the counsels of rulers, useful on the bench of justice. Happy the nation which has such men amongst its counsellors, when an act of hasty tyranny is in danger of treading out the spark of grace and truth. Such a man is far removed from the enemies of Christ, if he be not yet enrolled amongst His friends. This was the part of Nicodemus, when the case of One greater than the Apostles was at issue, and he reminded his impetuous colleagues of that first maxim of equity, *Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?* Not long afterwards, he who at first came to Jesus by night, and who even at this stage in his history is a timid and doubting ally, is found tending the lifeless corpse from which the Apostles have fled panic-stricken, and testifying a love and a devotion refused by men who owe to Christ their all.

But yet we must not overrate a quality which has so much in it of good. Candour, moderation, an open mind and a calm judgment, these are useful qualities; these, at certain times, may rise even into great virtues. But we dare not say that any one of them, or that all of them together, will suffice to save a soul. There are just a few great questions on which minds ought to be made up; on which if the evidence we possess be not sufficient for conviction, it is our first and most bounden duty to seek and to obtain more. Such a question, above all others, is that of the truth and power, of the person and work, of the Messiahship and Divinity, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To be candid on this subject is better indeed than to be prejudiced, scoffing, or

hostile: but there is a third alternative besides these two; and he who is merely candid concerning Christ is in danger of a life-long suspense, of an ultimate indifference. Men of mere candour, admirable and beautiful as that gift is, are commonly men who in great emergencies disappoint, and in critical decisions are even worse than foes. Their presence is fatal to generous impulses, to noble enthusiasms. Erasmus was the Gamaliel of the Reformation; calm, critical, deliberative, discerning: but where would the Reformation have been, if beside Erasmus there had not been a Luther? If all had waited to see whether this counsel or this work was of men or of God, by watching for its issue, the blow for truth had never been struck, and a reformed faith had never emerged from the mists of Papal darkness. In details, or on subjects of minor moment, it is harmless, it is right, to be Gamaliels: but on the one great question, of having or not having a Saviour, of being or not being redeemed and pardoned and justified, that man is a fool who postpones his decision, a lost man who dies without making it.

3. I would have distinguished, did time permit, a third character among those here presented; that of the common people who *magnified* the believers though they durst not join them, and who gladly used, though it were but from a distance, their beneficent and healing power. These too have their counterpart amongst us. There are men, and there are women, now in the midst of us, who reverence religion with all their hearts; who count the Christian alone happy; who delight, as it were, to gather the crumbs beneath the sacred table, to profit by Christian converse and to record the triumphs of the Gospel; but who yet shrink from counting themselves very members of that holy fellowship; never think themselves worthy even of an approach to the sacramental feast; and if they should die in this state, would die with faintest hope of attaining to the inheritance of the saints in light. Such persons are not against Christ, yet neither are they yet quite with Him. They are something more than candid enquirers; something far, far beyond men waiting, like Gamaliel, to see the end, and to judge from a point wholly out

of sight, a point unattainable on earth, of the testimonials and credentials of the Gospel. Would that they could be induced to take just that one step which divides them from every hope and every comfort of a Christian. Would that they could be led, by God's grace, to cross bold'y that narrow margin, and become not spectators only but inmates of the sacred porch of Solomon. Believe only, not that Christ died for some, but that He died for thee; believe only, not in the abstract doctrine of forgiveness, but in the fact of the forgiveness of thy sins: and thou art one with the Christian fellowship; no longer an admirer but a partaker of the promises, yea, a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the very household of God.

4. Finally, the text itself, and the passage now reviewed, tells us of a fourth character; that of the not *almost* but *altogether* Christian. Hear his creed as it is rehearsed in this record. *I believe that I ought to obey God rather than men. I believe that Christ died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification. I believe that God has exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour. I believe that the very purpose of that exaltation is, that He may bestow repentance and bestow forgiveness. I believe that God for His sake gives His Holy Spirit to all who set themselves in His strength to obey.* What is this but the faith of our own Church, handed down to us from days when Peter and Paul, when John and James, yet trod the earth? This is the faith of which it was written, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* This was the faith which enabled Apostles to brave persecution, nay, to rejoice to be *counted worthy to suffer shame*, or even death itself, *for the name*, the one sufficient name in which alone is salvation. My brethren, who can doubt which of these four characters is the one which it would be happiest to live with, safest and most glorious to possess in death? Believe only, and it shall be yours. It is not far off from thee, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up to heaven for me, that he may fetch it and give it? or, Who shall go over the sea for me, and bring it to me, that I may take it

and wear it? Nay, it is very nigh thee; offered thee freely, made thine by prayer: whosoever will may have it for the asking. God of His infinite mercy endue us all with it; that earnest faith, that bright hope, that generous love, that noble courage. Then, come life or come death, it must be well with us: for *we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

LECTURE XIII.

THE FIRST ORDINATION.

Acts vi. 15.

And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

In the early Church all was movement. In these few pages, while the annals of the Church are still journals, what have we not read of? Signs and wonders, first from above, and then (yet more decisively) within; numerous, sudden, but most real conversions; persecutions bravely endured; public testimony nobly borne; hypocrisy and deception instantly unmasked and detected by a gift of discernment as infallible as it was intuitive; these were the marks of a Church that had life in it, of a Church in which God Himself was still dwelling and working. It ought to be a solemn and heart-searching process, with all of us, to read of these things in our days and in our congregations. God grant that it be not all in vain.

Now see the Church adapting itself to new wants, and facing new difficulties.

And in those days, while the disciples were multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, that their widows were being overlooked in the daily ministration. The Hellenists were those Jews who spoke the Greek language, and whose ordinary abode was out of Palestine. They were com-

monly looked down upon by the Hebrews, who prided themselves upon having adhered to the national language, and (for the most part, though not exclusively) to the national home. This jealousy found its way even into the Christian body. Out of that common fund, of which we have read in former chapters, there was a daily distribution, in the form of food or money, according to the wants of each person or each household. A suspicion arose that this distribution was not fairly made. You all know how common such misunderstandings and such imputations are in all charitable ministrations. Human nature is the same in all times; and here we read of its first outbreak in a blessed and holy society. The Hellenists considered that *their widows*, the desolate and destitute members of their section of the Church, were overlooked in the daily distribution. And see how wisely and how considerately the complaint was met.

And the twelve, the Apostles, who till now appear to have been the sole rulers and the sole managers of the affairs of the community, *called to them the multitude of the disciples, and said, It is not satisfactory that we should desert the word of God and serve* (*minister to*) *tables.* The labour of providing for the support of the poor was now becoming so onerous, in the increased numbers of the community, as grievously to interfere with the spiritual functions of those who were charged with the ministry of the Word. And this, they say, is *not pleasing;* not consistent with the will of God, or of those whose heart is set upon higher duties. *Look ye out then, brethren, seven attested men from among you,* seven men of good report or character, *full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business: and we will adhere to prayer and the ministry of the word.* The ministry or service of the word is set in contrast with the ministry or service of tables: it is the same expression in the two cases.

And the word, the proposal, *pleased*, was satisfactory, *in the sight of all the multitude: and they selected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus a proselyte of Antioch.* Judging by the names alone, we should suppose them

to have been all Grecians or Hellenists; leaving the Hebrew section to be cared for as before. *Whom they set before the Apostles; and they* (the Apostles) *prayed and* then *laid on them their hands.* The choice was made by the whole Church: but the solemn act of consecration was performed by the Apostles.

Thus was a complaint remedied, and an impediment to effective action removed.

And the word of God grew on, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly, and a great company of the priests obeyed the faith. A marvellous testimony to the truth and power of the Gospel! The very priests, whose interests and prepossessions were all strongly against it, now began, in large numbers, to add themselves to the Church of Christ.

And now our attention is to be fixed for some time upon one person; one eminent member of the new order.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, a man largely endowed with that grace, that favour and blessing, of God, which is the strength of man, *was doing great wonders and signs among the people. But there arose some of those who belonged to the synagogue which was called that of the Libertini, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen.* The Libertini were the class of Roman freedmen, or enfranchised slaves. A Roman historian tells of the addiction of this class to Jewish superstitions, and of their banishment, in consequence, from Rome, fourteen or fifteen years before this time, by a decree of the Senate under the Emperor Tiberius. Four thousand of them were sent to the island of Sardinia, and the rest were to leave Italy unless before a certain day they renounced their religious rites. This fact sufficiently accounts for their having now a synagogue in Jerusalem. Cyrene and Alexandria, cities of Africa, were great centres of Jewish residence. Thus *Egypt, and the parts of Libya about Cyrene,* are especially mentioned as furnishing Jewish visitors to Jerusalem on the great day of Pentecost. Cilicia, of which the chief town was Tarsus, and Asia (in its more limited sense, of a district on the Western side of Asia Minor) also gave names, as we are here

told, to two at least of the 460 or 480 synagogues of which we read as existing at this time in Jerusalem. These were the leaders of the opposition to the holy and devoted work of him who was destined to be the first martyr for the cause of Christ.

And they had not strength to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. I will give you, such had been our Lord s promise to His people, *a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.*

That which could not be done fairly must be done by artifice. Like his Master before him, Stephen must fall under false evidence. And in both cases the false evidence is of that particular kind—the most difficult of all to answer—which consists in the distortion of truth : the literal words given, but the context and scope of the words wholly misrepresented and belied. *Then they suborned men saying*, they prepared or procured men privily to give this evidence, *We have heard him speak blasphemous* (*calumnious*) *words as to Moses and* as to *God. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and set upon him, and seized him, and brought him to the council*, the Sanhedrin, or council of the Seventy, of which we have read in earlier chapters, *and set up false witnesses saying, This man ceases not to speak words against this holy place and the law : for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth*, this Jesus, of whom we have lately heard so much—there is a mixture of impatience and contempt in the form of the expression—*shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered to us*, gave us by transmission (such is the force of the expression) from the mouth of God. *And all who took their seats in the council, when they had fixed their gaze upon him, saw his countenance as if the countenance of an angel.*

And let us too, my brethren, fix our gaze upon the scene here presented. We shall find in this opening passage of the record of the first Christian martyrdom, much to instruct us in the wisdom of God, and to guide us in the way in which we should go.

1. And first we will say a word upon the manner in which Christ, the great Head of the Church, has fulfilled His original

promise, *Lo, I am with you alway.* It has not been by fixing one rigid immovable framework of law and discipline, with which, amidst all conceivable varieties and variations of circumstances, human affairs must be forced into consistency. We read tonight of what is commonly called the institution of the diaconate, of the order of deacons in the Church of Christ. The word *deacon* does not, I believe, occur with reference to these first seven officers. The only one of them whose name occurs in the subsequent history is described as *Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven.* And we have already noticed, by implication at least, that the word from which the terms *deacon, deaconship, diaconate,* are derived is just as much used here of the work of the Apostles as of the seven delegates: the *ministry* (or *deaconship*) *of the word* is set in contrast with the *ministry* (or *deaconship*) *of tables.* What do I draw from this? Two remarks.

(1) We must be careful not to be slaves of words. We must not be quite sure that, because we have the name *deacons* in our Church system, therefore we have the exact thing so designated in Scripture; or (to take another example) that, because we read of *bishops* in the New Testament, therefore the Church officers whom we so describe hold precisely the same place, or exercise precisely the same functions.

(2) How beautifully does God adapt His measures, in the government of His Church, to the circumstances in which, as the God of Providence, He from time to time sets that Church; thereby giving us an added reason for believing that the God of Providence is also the Lord and God of the Church. Trace the observation through the narrative here before us. In the first days of all, there were no Church officers at all save the Apostles. They were the teachers, they were the rulers, they were also the bankers and the treasurers, the almoners and the distributors, of the Christian community. By degrees their work becomes overwhelming. Secular business—for such in fact it was—has encroached upon, and is in danger of absolutely engrossing, time and strength needed for higher purposes. The rapid growth of numbers, and the self denying sacrifices of property for Church

uses, occasioned by the devoted zeal of first convictions, have together created a whole department of duty which cannot be neglected without injury of one kind, nor attended to without injury of another. Complaints are arising that the interests of one section of the disciples are being postponed to those of another section. Under these circumstances how does the indwelling Spirit of wisdom guide and counsel? In other words, how does the everliving Lord of the Church direct and guard its course? A new emergency demands a new expedient. Let the functions of administration be divided. Men of equity and good sense are enough for the discharge of one; the apportionment of the funds of charity. This work requires not the higher gifts of inspiration, and would rather hinder their exercise. Sometimes inferior endowments do even better for this lower and humbler duty. Let then the Church itself—that is, the whole body of believing people—select a few persons—say, seven in number—to relieve the Apostles of the daily distribution. This is good counsel: the Church will be the better for it. And then the Apostles can return with less distraction to their great spiritual duties; prayer, and the ministry of the Word. The inference we draw from this narrative is, not the necessity of having always seven men in every congregation charged with the work of deacons; nor even the necessity of having in every truly Apostolical Church an order of men so denominated, without reference to the particular duties which they may be set to fulfil; but rather, the importance of looking changes of Church circumstances full in the face, and meeting them with faith and firmness, with an earnest purpose and an unshaken courage.

We say indeed, in the Preface to our Ordination Services, that *it is evident to all men diligently reading the holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church; Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.* There have been in all times three departments of duty, needing for their right discharge three orders of Church officers. There has been the work of ruling; of ordering with authority details of practice in the congregations, and of exer-

cising discipline over such as do amiss. And there has been the work of the regular Pastor; the work of leading the worship, of conducting the instruction, and of superintending the daily life, of the congregation; of visiting the sick, teaching the young, and seeking to reclaim for Christ the wandering and the outcast. And there has been in the third place the work of seeking out the poor and needy, of providing for their relief, of gathering the alms of the congregation, and of assisting in its services by all such means as do not imply either authority to govern or authority to teach. We believe that our own Church has adhered to the Apostolical model in so distributing its ministerial duties. We believe that a Church which seeks to combine all these offices in one is wanting, at least in this respect, as much in wisdom as in humility. But it is not the possession of the name which secures to us the thing. Theory is seldom identical with practice: it may depart from it very widely. And we must not hesitate to confess that in practice our Church has too much lost, under the pressure of circumstances, one at least of her three Orders. The rapid and unequal growth of our national population, the obsolete yet unchangeable distribution of our Parishes, and the poverty (I do not fear to say it) of our ordinary Church endowments, have compelled us, in most cases, to use our Deacons almost as Priests: in other words, it has been better to allow the higher office to be encroached upon by the lower, than to leave our Churches without pastors, or to acquiesce in the assumption of the pastoral office by unordained men.

We speak of this necessity as an evil: doubtless it has caused a departure in practice from the rigid theory of our Church constitution. But do we say that even these circumstances are not of the Lord? Do we say that this unavoidable modification of our Church system, arising out of causes beyond our control, has been a thing to mourn over as a sin? Nay, my brethren, we read with more intelligence—or think we do—the opening words of this Chapter, *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied.* We see in those words the encouragement of the Church of all time, to hope that her exigencies have a notice in

heaven, and her efforts to meet them an approval from One who is with her alway. What has been the issue—what, we may humbly say, the design—of our present difficulties? We have been compelled to use for higher work men invested only with the name of deacons: and both they, and we of the middle order, are in danger of being constrained too much to leave the Word of God and serve tables: we find ourselves week by week, in our large towns, too much called off from sacred employments to manage charitable funds, to superintend the daily distribution, even to assist in the formation and superintendence of institutions merely benevolent: these things are all against us; we are tempted to complain of them as simply adverse, entirely calamitous. But what should *the answer of God* say to us? Shall it not remind us that in every emergency His Spirit can suggest a remedy for that which His Providence has permitted? Shall it not bid us take counsel with ourselves and with one another as to the remedies, as to the correctives, at least as to the palliatives, which we may apply to the diseases of our times? And may it not remind us of the blessings which have resulted, and which may still more largely result, from the necessity which has been upon us of looking more to the congregation, to brethren and sisters moving in common life, set apart by no act of ordination, but *giving themselves first to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God*, to aid us in those parts of our pressing duty which it can be no profanation for a layman to discharge; more especially in that *serving of tables*, that care for the bodily wants of the poor, which in the first days caused the establishment of a new order in the ministry, and which in all times must be one of the first anxieties and first responsibilities of a Church which, like its Lord, would *go about* upon earth *doing good?* It may not be by the help of new statutes or new canons; it may not be by the enactment of rulers whether in Church or State; but, God helping us, it shall be by the spontaneous and not less Christian growth, in our several Parishes, of a spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice, that we will meet the wants of our times, looking out among us men and women of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom,

whom we, with the strictest regard to propriety and Church order, will set over this part of the business to which we are unequal, if so be, for your sakes and for our own, we may with the less distraction give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. While others are looking this way and that, to Convocation or to Parliament, for new names and new rules by which the wants of the world may be met and the disorders of a Church system redressed; let us rather see what we, each of us, can do for the place in which our lot is cast, and by the help of Church-Wardens, of Scripture-Readers, of District-Visitors, and of voluntary School-teachers, do rather than discuss the work which Christ in every age looks for from His Church and from His people. *It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables:* help us then, every one of you, to whom God has given the will and the power, in carrying out more successfully the noble determination, *We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.*

2. Do not say, beloved brethren, that the topic thus brought before you is wanting in practical edification. It is not so, if God give the grace to entertain and to apply it But we will not separate without an earnest effort to learn something, as from the institution which introduces to us the history of Stephen, so also from the account of his life and the record of his spirit.

He was a man *full of grace and power.* Yes, grace is power. He who has the favour of God with him, and the blessing of God upon him, cannot be weak, must be strong. Men much mistake the way to power. They think place will give it: or they think fame will give it: or they think a vehement manner, a noisy, pushing, obtrusive forwardness, which will let nothing be done without their help and presence, will give them power. O, much do they mistake in these ideas of it! Commune much with your own heart; be still in the solitude of your chamber; lie low before God's footstool in penitence and prayer: and then come forth to your work and to your labour; fill your assigned place, high or low, as God's consecrated one, in all lowliness and in all meekness; and you will be a man of power too. Men will *take*

knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus; and in that connection, that companionship, with Him, is everlasting strength.

Who that has lived even to middle age has not been struck with the position which true grace holds in the life of this world? At first sight we have thought a good man feeble: we have seen him using a courtesy and a humility and a self-forgetfulness and a preference of others, which we have hastily associated with the idea of weakness. But we have looked again, years afterwards, and that man has accomplished works not given to the strong. It is he who has effected great things for God: it is he who has regenerated a Parish, it is he who has overcome opposition and lived down obloquy, it is he whom enemies respect and strong men follow. Not in vain are the words written, *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. The meek-spirited shall possess the earth, and shall be refreshed in the multitude of peace.* They who by faith *see the Invisible* are men not more of faith than of power. And one day they shall be owned as such, *when he that overcometh shall inherit all things.*

The text seems to tell us of a power in the very *look* of faith. Stephen stood before the council, charged with blasphemy against God and God's law, charged with profaneness towards the temple, and impiety towards Him who dwelt there. Around and before him were his judges; full of prejudice and animosity, prepared to condemn, and, if to condemn, to execute. And yet, as they gazed on that face, they could not but own that it shone as with angelic lustre: the heavenly calm, the profound peace, the entire trust, the perfect patience, written on that brow so that he who ran might read, betokened the presence of one who had beheld the very face of God, of one of those messengers who *excel in strength*, who *fulfil God's commandment, hearkening to the voice of His words.* Before he spoke, he was heard. God was in his countenance before He was on his lips. O the power of that wondrous instrument, the human face, for good or else for evil! O the persuasiveness of that eloquence of the good man's countenance, which needs not breath to make it vocal! O the transparency of that eye which knows not deceit; the repose of that brow which

communes much with heaven! Before it, again and again, vice has slunk away ashamed, and the word of impurity and profaneness died upon the lips unspoken. Yes, the tale of a life is recorded on our faces; insensibly we reveal it. *The skin of Moses' face shone* after communion with God: he veiled it in condescension to the sinful. It is a true parable. Let a man be much with God, and his very face will show it. God grant that more of us may bear this most undesigned, most unsuspicious testimony, to the certainty of things hoped for, the reality of things not seen.

LECTURE XIV.

LIVING ORACLES.

Acts vii. 38.

Who received the lively oracles to give unto us.

There are those who confess themselves unable to discern in St Stephen's defence before the Jewish Council anything directly bearing upon the accusation which it sought to refute. They only read it as a rehearsal of his creed as a believer in the Jewish Scriptures. They suppose him to have desired to ingratiate himself with his audience, by reciting to them the history of God's dealings with their nation, and showing himself a true-hearted Israelite, incapable of doing despite to the Law or to the Temple. And no doubt it is the speech of a simple and perhaps unlettered man, not the composition of a master of rhetoric or an experienced debater. No doubt also its opening paragraphs are so expressed as to avoid prematurely irritating his judges by an avowal of the personal application which lies beneath all and at length bursts from his lips. We may suppose also, if we will, that the address was rudely interrupted before it had reached that orderly close which might have given clearness and consistency to the whole.

But, with all these abatements, which of us may not admire in this defence a real and true fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, *I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist?*

For what, let us remember, was the crime imputed to him? What was the indictment, as we read it in the last chapter? *Then they suborned men, who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. They brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, who said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.* Irreverence towards the Law of Moses and the Temple, shown in predicting that the time was at hand when the Lord and Saviour would bring both to an end, this was the offence of the prisoner as defined by the accusers and substantiated by their witnesses.

Now could any line of defence be more suitable than one which, while recognizing to the full the divine mission of Moses, the divine origin of the Law, and the divine institution of the Temple, should yet show that these things were all supplementary in their introduction and parenthetical in their design? That the promises of God, as made to the forefathers of Israel, were entirely independent, both in place and time, of those institutions which were now regarded as their sole depository and shrine? That the call of Abraham was made far away from Canaan, and that whole centuries even of the later national history were passed in other lands? That the great Lawgiver himself was not only refused and disobeyed by his people, but himself prophesied of the coming of a greater and mightier than himself? That this Temple on which they prided themselves, on which they threw the whole stress of their faith and dependence, had not only been late in its erection, but was also spoken of by their own prophets as never (in the highest sense of all) the dwelling-place of God? And that, finally, no amount of confidence on their part in the clearness of their discernment or the justice of their judgment, on a question of religion or of revelation, could be the slightest indication, in reality, of truth or right; every prophet, in his generation, having been set at nought and persecuted, not excluding even the Messiah Himself, of whom, while professing

daily to look for Him, they had themselves been now the betrayers and murderers? I know not that any line of argument, any amount of premeditation or any art of eloquence, could have touched more exactly the very point at issue, or entered more thoroughly into the hidden principles which gave interest and importance to the decision.

It is not my intention to break up this discourse into portions, and to go minutely into the details of the history which it recapitulates. But let me run through the topics as they occur, and briefly indicate their connection with the accusation and defence. In so doing, I shall seek to express by a brief paraphrase what I understand to be the purport and sequence of the whole discourse.

You charge me with disparaging the local character of our religion. You say that I speak of this Temple as destined to an overthrow predicted by my Master. Let me remind you then how far, and how far only, the faith of our fathers is bound up with local conditions. The original home and cradle of our race was not Palestine, but Mesopotamia, in the far East, on the other side of the great river, the river Euphrates. It was there that the voice of God was first heard calling to fallen man. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he even dwelt in Haran; before even that first migration which landed him not in Canaan but in a temporary restingplace. Hence in due season He removed him, by the same Divine call, into this land in which ye now dwell. But how did he enter it? As an owner? as a conqueror? as a sovereign? Nay, he possessed not in it land enough to set his foot on. And yet the promises were all his even then; and the Divine favour and protection; and the Divine communion and friendship. Judge ye therefore how far God's blessing is local. Judge ye, even in this first and greatest example, how far God is a respecter either of place or form.

And that independence of place which was first exemplified in Abraham was indicated no less in the prediction of his children's fortunes. In a strange land should they sojourn for centuries, and yet be God's people and God's chosen still. See how that

prophecy was fulfilled; by what sins, through what sufferings, of man; by what providences and what interpositions on the part of God. Behold the young brother sold as a slave by foes of his own household: see him carried into a remote and unfriendly land; him, the best and noblest of the sons of Israel: see him cast out of his father's home as one despised and forsaken, and yet, through vicissitudes as strange as they were sudden, raised to the pinnacle of greatness, while his father's sons bowed down to him. Does the thought occur to you, that in the varying fortunes of Joseph may have been prefigured the suffering and glory of a later and a mightier One? May not your own hands be red with the blood of a Brother after the flesh, who is also after the spirit your Lord and your Judge?

Trace then yet onward the course of the national history, and see the whole family of Israel seeking refuge out of Canaan: see generation after generation toiling on in Egyptian bondage; excluded from the land of promise, yet losing thereby no one mark of their ancestral privilege; still recognized, in heaven if not upon earth, as God's people, beloved for the fathers' sake. And yet, all this time, nothing was theirs in Canaan but a buryingplace, and century after century was wheeling its slow course over their exile. Mark then how the national fortunes were sunk to their lowest level; the very permission to live sought in vain for their sons from their oppressors; when at last he arose, guarded by God's special Providence from a threatened similar fate, who was to be first the deliverer from bondage, and then (under God) the founder of a new Dispensation.

And observe, when he came, late in time and mature in age; came with thoughts and words of kindness, seeking to reconcile or to avenge his brethren; how he was received and dealt with. Who made thee (it was said to him) a ruler and a judge over us? If he whom you so much reverence was once thus despised and rejected of his countrymen, may it not perhaps have been so with One whom God sent to supersede him? Can you urge as an argument against the mission of Jesus that general reproach and rejection, which would have been equally fatal to the authority of Moses? For forty

years he was in exile; a double exile; not from Canaan only, but from Egypt also. At last his call came; came, once more, not in the land of promise but in the wilderness; came too on the ground not of a new but of an old relationship; not as to the founder of a new religion, but as to the inheritor of a patriarchal covenant. Forget not Abraham in Moses. Never allow yourselves to date from Sinai a possession which was yours from Mesopotamia and from Haran. In your zeal for a Levitical law, lose not sight of a patriarchal promise. The God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush of Horeb was already the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

This Moses whom your ancestors refused, the same did God send to be their ruler and their deliverer. He brought them out. And do I disparage his high mission, by declaring that he was neither the first nor yet the last of God's messengers; that his Dispensation came in but by the way, between the Patriarchal and the Messianic? Listen to his own words. A Prophet (he said) shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear. He himself pointed the eye of faith onward to One who should come; like himself, as to the human nature; yet greater than himself, in proportion as the forerunner is less than the fore-announced, the servant of one nation than the Lord of all. I then am but echoing the voice of Moses, when I declare that the customs which he delivered were not designed to be indestructible or final.

This is that Moses: and how did you receive him? He was with the Church in the wilderness: with him was the Angel of the Divine Presence: to him were delivered those living oracles by which God communicated with His people: how did you treat him? Again and again you thrust him from you, and in your hearts turned back again into Egypt: little did you think then of that pleasant land which you would now make the whole of your inheritance and of your hope: yea, in the very wilderness you committed idolatry, and drew down upon you, before you entered Canaan, the threat of a second exile, of a national dispersion.

You charge me with blasphemy against the Temple. What have I said of it? I have said, it may be, that the Temple was no more

God's first or God's last dwellingplace below, than the Dispensation of Moses was either God's earliest or God's latest revelation. I have said that before the Temple was a Tabernacle; a Tabernacle fashioned under Divine direction; and exhibiting in solemn type realities which have their place in heaven. That was the centre of the Divine presence with Israel at the time when Joshua conquered, and through all the generations from Joshua to David. Does that consist with the idolatry of this Temple, as though without it God's presence would be impossible? Nay, have not your own Prophets declared that no temple made with hands can contain or enclose God? that heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool, and the very house which you build for Him already His handywork?

But with what hope can I urge upon you suggestions of reason or arguments of revelation? There is in you a tradition of resistance to the divine and the spiritual. Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. As they did to the servants, so have ye done to the Master: they slew the heralds of the Just One, and ye have been now His betrayers and murderers. O blessed and privileged—knew ye but your happiness—above all nations! possessors of a Law, in the promulgation of which on Mount Sinai the very principalities and powers in heavenly places exercised a solemn and terrific office! and yet not keeping it; trifling ever with God's day of visitation, until at last your house is left unto you desolate!

Thus far I have sought to trace for you the order of St Stephen's defence; supplying here and there a link of thought perhaps intentionally left obscure, and passing lightly over many details, both of history and of argument, which seemed less than essential to its understanding as a whole. I trust there may be those amongst us whose reverence for God's Word may be heightened or quickened by our present study of one of its parts.

And now, before we pass to our conclusion, I will address one earnest word to persons who may have noticed with anxiety in this chapter, or who may have heard it noticed by others in a tone of cavil or disbelief, that in one or two minor points the account here given of the Jewish history seems to vary from that

contained in the narrative of the Old Testament. For example, the history in the book of Genesis tells us that the buryingplace bought by Abraham was in Mamre or Hebron, not at Sychem; and that it was bought by him of Ephron the Hittite, Jacob (not Abraham) being the purchaser of the ground at Shechem of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father. My friends, can you really suppose that a difference of this nature has anything to do, this way or that, with the substantial truth of the Gospel Revelation? I declare to you that I would not waste the time in endeavouring (if I were able) to reconcile such a variance. It is to be regretted that Christian persons, in their zeal for the literal accuracy of our Holy Book, have spoken and written as if they thought that anything could possibly depend upon such a question. We all know how easy it is to get two witnesses in a court of justice to give their stories of an occurrence in the same words: we all know also how instant is the suspicion of falsehood which that formal coincidence of statement brings upon them. Holy Scripture shows what I may indeed call a noble superiority to all such uniformity. Each book of our Bible is an independent witness; shown to be so, not least, by verbal or even actual differences on some trifling points of detail. And they who drink most deeply at the fountainhead of Divine Truth learn to estimate these things in the same manner; to feel what we might describe as a lordly disdain for all infidel objections drawn from this sort of petty, paltry, cavilling, carping, creeping criticism. Let our faith at last, God helping us, be strong enough and decided enough to override a few, or a multitude, of such objections. We will hear them unmoved: we will fearlessly examine them: if we cannot resolve them, then, in the power of a more majestic principle, we will calmly turn from them and pass them by. What we know not now, we may know hereafter; and if we *never* know, we will believe still.

For indeed the *lively oracles* of which the text speaks to us were given for other purposes than that of a merely intellectual satisfaction. What St Stephen says of the Law or of the books of Moses, what St Paul says of the Old Testament Scriptures

in general, we shall all be prepared to claim as the description of our two Testaments, and of that Holy Bible which contains them both. That Book, as a whole, is our oracle: in it are comprised the living oracles, the oracles of God.

An oracle is the answer of a God. In days of old, days of heathen superstition, men went with their difficulties to obtain an answer at some recognized utterance-place of their God. If a man was going to undertake an enterprise of any kind, if a king was about to make war upon another king, if a private person was at a loss upon any subject of domestic concern, he went, as it was said, to consult an oracle; to ask for an inspired direction whether he should go or not go, whether he should act or whether he should forbear. These days are past. It was a natural wish—one which we have all felt a thousand times—to have some finger-post erected for us at one of the ambiguous turning-points of life, saying, This is the way, not that: this is the path of safety; this is the way of duty: take this road, and thou shalt be safe; take not this, and thou shalt do well. In days of oracular responses, the answer was so framed, by the craft and fraud of priests, that, whichever way the event shaped itself, the answer could scarcely be found wanting: all was ambiguity, all was double-tongued: the credit of the oracle, not the welfare of the consultor, was the thing aimed at and guarded. Now *the oracles are dumb:* men found them out, and *a more excellent way* was opened.

The Bible is God's oracle. It is a *living* oracle, not a dumb or dead one. It has a voice for every man in every circumstance. Men gather round it day by day from East and West, men of diverse race and lineage and speech, of various tastes and habits and circumstances; and to each one it speaks audibly; to each one it speaks individually, and it speaks decisively. All our difficulties, all our perplexities, all our intricate and secret distresses, we may bring them to the Bible, and we shall find our way.

But how does it do this? Are we, like the superstitious of other days, to open our Bible at random, and take the first verse

which meets us as our guide? Or is one who has neglected his Bible through long days of prosperity, to read it for the first time in his trouble, and be sure of a clear and loud response? God cares more for us than to give us this sort of ready-made indolent direction. The oracle itself is vocal only to the wise; only, that is, to those who daily visit it, and seek to frame life and speech, thought and action, habitually by its rule. If a man complains that he gets no good from his Bible, depend upon it, that man does not read it; does not read it regularly, or does not read it upon his knees. It is by visiting our oracle daily, even as we daily need guidance; it is by coming to it as to God's presence, not superstitiously indeed, but reverently and devoutly; it is by living much in that heavenly atmosphere, becoming used to it so that its tone and its air shall be ours, its mode of judging of men and things familiar and at last habitual to us; it is by so reading God's Word as that what it reveals it reveals to *us*, and what it enjoins it enjoins upon *us*, and what it promises it promises to *us;* it is in this way that the dead page starts into life, and the black ink into a voice, and the written word into a quickening spirit, so that at last its principles are our principles, and its judgments our judgments, and its ways of thinking (which are God's ways) ours: and then insensibly we begin to view each particular occurrence as God views it, and to hear each call of duty as God utters it: the things that are seen shrink into their due dimensions beside things that are not seen, and time becomes as nothing in the light of eternity, and misfortune which has chastened is honestly felt to have been a blessing, and disappointment which makes earth blank makes heaven bright to us: and on the other hand, sin which has brought its pleasures is looked upon as a twofold evil, and duty which has had its hardships is welcomed as a double good: and then at length the soul which has learned God's language is fitted to converse with God, and the life which has been transformed is ready to be transplanted, and a well-known voice is heard saying, *Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.*

God grant, my brethren, to each one of us, so to use this

treasure which is in our hands, whether hitherto shut or open, that we may find it vocal to us in His name. And to those who have it not, or who use it not, or from ignorance cannot use, ye, who have freely received, as freely give. That so, in God's good time, we may be a people fearing Him and working righteousness; a Church and a Nation to which the promise has at length been verified, *I will dwell in them and walk in them, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*

LECTURE XV.

THE FIRST MARTYRDOM.

Acts vii. 60.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

The subject which lies now before us is the record of a martyrdom; the violent and suffering end of the first Christian man who was called to give his life for the testimony of Jesus.

As they heard these things, they were cut to the heart—sawn asunder in their hearts is the exact expression—*and they gnashed* (or *ground*) *their teeth against* (*upon*, or *at*) *him. But being full of the Holy Ghost*—and the word used implies not that he became so for once, but that he was already and habitually so—*he fixed a stedfast gaze upon the heaven, and saw a glory of God*, a bright light such as that which in the tabernacle of old betokened God's immediate presence, *and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And he said, Lo, I behold the heavens opened asunder, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. And they cried with a loud voice, and stopped their ears*, that they might escape the sound which they deemed blasphemy, *and rushed with one accord upon him, and having cast him out without the city they proceeded to stone him. And the witnesses*, those of whom we read in the 6th chapter as suborned to charge him with blasphemy, *laid aside their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul.*

It was the rule of the Law of Moses, *At the mouth of two*

witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. And so in this case the letter of the Law was strictly kept, while its spirit was so cruelly outraged.

The exertion of stoning required that the loose outer garment should be thrown off; and in this instance it is specially recorded, for the instruction of the Church of all time, that the person who took charge of the clothes of the witnesses, during this terrible execution, and thus proved himself to be the partisan and abettor of the deed, was a young man named Saul; now first mentioned in the sacred story, but destined to fill afterwards its largest and most illustrious page, under the new name and in the new character of the blessed and holy Apostle St Paul.

And they stoned Stephen—it was a long and dreadful process, and they went through with it; first the witnesses, and then the excited and infuriated crowd—*while he called upon*—the word *God*, you observe, which follows in our Version, is not in the original; and the remainder of the sentence bids us rather to supply the name of our Lord Jesus—*while he called upon (invoked) and said, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. And he kneeled down*, in the midst of that cruel hail of missiles under which his life was gradually sinking, *and cried with a loud voice, Lord, weigh not to them*, place not in the scales against them, *this sin. And having said this, he fell asleep.*

God give us grace to lay to heart some of these touching and solemn lessons.

1. We are called to notice one effect of Divine truth upon sinful men. We are apt to suppose that, where truth does not save, it does nothing. We are in the habit, ourselves, too often, of listening to God's Word with the outward ear, without giving it any entrance. In this manner many of us have heard, I dare say, a thousand Sermons in the last ten years, of which not only we retain no impression, but we never received any. The preacher might gather hope from hearing that a Sermon had made one of his audience angry. There are those whom God's truth faithfully

spoken ought to make angry. Those whom it does not instruct it ought to irritate. This torpid lifeless acquiescence, which is the common spirit of hearing, is a terrible sign, when we compare the hearing with the living. It was not so always. When an Apostle preached, some were converted, and the rest were angered. That was because there was a reality in the message. It came home. It could not be quietly stowed away amongst other neglected lumber in the memory or in the conscience. It was felt to have a life in it, and, where it did not quicken, it stung.

Observe the strength of the expression here used in describing the effect of Stephen's defence upon his accusers and his judges. *They were cut to the heart.* But it is even more than this: *they were sawn asunder in their hearts.* In the list of martyrdoms recorded in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, this phrase occurs; *they were sawn asunder.* It was one horrible kind of martyrdom to which saints of old were subjected. But here the martyr himself is said thus to torture his hearers. *As they heard, they were sawn asunder in their hearts.* It is just the description of the effect of the ministry of the two witnesses in the figurative language of the 11th chapter of the Revelation of St John. *They that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them,* when they are at last slain, *and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.* The word of God spoken by their lips had been as fire and sword in the hearts of the unbelieving. *They were sawn asunder in their hearts, and they ground their teeth at him* in their fury. Wherever else in Holy Scripture this figure occurs, the grinding or gnashing of the teeth for pain and rage, it is in connection with the future punishment of the wicked. *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* It is as though the very torment of hell were begun on earth beneath the faithful and powerful ministry of the Divine Word. There is *gnashing of teeth* at it already.

And is that the word which we hear, which we preach? O, it is a grave question both for us and you! Well do you know that this is not the effect which the minister would desire, in this

beloved congregation, for the word spoken. Not this: the very opposite of this. But only we would pray God that the effect be not nothing; powerful neither way; merely negative, merely nugatory, merely soporific. If we cannot see fruits of life, we would rather see anything come of it than nothing. But, to do this, the word must be first true, and next it must be brought home. The mere proclamation of sin and salvation, in general terms, will not anger any man; neither perhaps, in these days, will it arouse any man. We must pray for grace to speak as St Stephen did, plainly, sometimes severely, always without regard to prepossessions and prejudices, be they ever so universal or ever so inveterate; to tell, as he did, of that hardness of heart which is ever resisting the Holy Ghost; of that coming demolition of all human hopes and human trusts, which will *try every man's work*, as by fire, *of what sort it is;* and more especially of that spiritual worship, and that spiritual life, which alone God, who is Spirit, can accept or bless, when He *comes*, year after year, *seeking fruit on this fig-tree*, and alas, too often, too often, *finding none.*

2. There is one figure, more especially, in this motley throng, on which the eye must dwell for a moment before we fix every thought on the central form itself. That young man whose name is Saul; an educated, reflecting, moral man; familiar with God's Law and God's Word from his childhood; living already, living habitually, as he afterwards tells us, *in all good conscience* towards God and man; and yet an unbeliever in Jesus; and yet a hater of the light; and yet a persecutor of the saints: what a study is he for the thoughtful; what a warning, in one sense, to the religious. You see what the force of prejudice is; what the strength of early habit, of long association, of general opinion in the particular world (great or small) which is *our* world. Even conscience, you perceive, is not an infallible guide: conscience itself may be culpably unenlightened; left by our own fault uninformed as to things true, as to facts and occurrences which should change the whole course of our being: and if this is so, then we may walk each day by the light of conscience, and yet

be all the time *a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious;* a waster of the true Church of God; and have to speak, in after life, if a total change should have been vouchsafed to us, of *sinners of whom I am chief.* Saul, the moral, the conscientious; the diligent student, the scrupulous worshipper; *was consenting* at this time *to the death* of Stephen, and *keeping the raiment of them that slew him.* Let us all pray, as for a clear, so also for an enlightened conscience. Can we not enter into the feeling with which Paul the Apostle, looking back upon the earlier life of Saul the persecutor, prayed for his converts, that they might *prove things that differ,* and *approve things that are excellent;* that they *might be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that* so *they might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing?* For lack of this he was still fighting against that God whom he daily worshipped and daily sought to serve.

3. And now let us devote the moments which remain, to the contemplation of that saint and servant of the Lord whose cruel yet glorious end is here set before us. Let us strive so to enter into his faith and hope and charity, that we may all follow him, in life and in death, even as he first followed Christ.

His testimony is now all but ended. But one chapter before, we heard of him for the first time, as *a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, full of grace and power,* set apart, by the choice of the congregation, and by the laying on of the Apostles' hands, to a humble but blessed office in the ministry of the infant Church of Christ. We know not how long he laboured in that service; less, we are left to suppose, than one whole year: and yet those few weeks or months, what a trace have they left behind them; what a trace, and what a testimony. We seem already to see something of the meaning of those words of St Peter, *One day is with the Lord as a thousand years.* It is a great encouragement to activity *while it is called Today.* There may be scarcely a tomorrow for us below: then let today be vigorous. Put nothing off that can be done for Christ. Complain, if you will, of the shortness of your day, but never of its weariness. Think how

Stephen, just because he was full of grace and therefore full of power, *did great wonders and miracles among the people,* though his career was to be cut short as in a moment, by an end which seemed to speak only of disappointment and of defeat.

That was the testimony of his life; his brief Christian life, and his humble Christian ministry; in itself a mere *serving of tables* to lighten the Apostles' toil. And now for his death: how did he who had *magnified Christ by life* magnify Him also *by death,* and both alike *in his body?*

(1) First then, he never lost faith. He did not say to himself, *All these things are against me.* He did not say to himself, If Christ had designed to own my work, He would not thus have cut it short. He did not say, If this be the manner in which Christ's cause prospers below, how can I believe that He Himself lives and reigns above? None of these things. Never was his faith so strong, or his vision so unclouded, as in that last clamorous riotous scene in which life itself was to be sacrificed. While his enemies are rushing upon him with one accord, his eyes are fixed stedfastly on heaven: he is rapt above earth and earthly things, and privileged to behold in clear and bright vision his beloved Master Himself standing in manifested glory at the right hand of God. He sees Him, not seated in royal dignity, but standing as in act to succour; and bears one last, one crowning witness to His risen life, to His resistless power, to His omnipresent grace. He said, *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.*

(2) And then with what a hopefulness of mind, and with what a quietness of spirit, does he address himself to this sudden, this cruel, this shameful suffering. In the midst of the uproar of angry voices, and of the flight of blinding stupefying crushing stones, he has a majesty of meekness and a power of prayer not given to others in seasons of tranquillity and of repose. All the time, he is calling upon his Master, and saying, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* Not in the manner in which men use that sacred name, of God or of Christ, as a mere expression of pain or disquietude or weakness; or in the ignorant ejaculations some-

times heard from a sinner's deathbed, when for the first time he feels himself in the grasp of a mightier power, which must be propitiated by abject invocation: not thus, but in the tone of one who *knows in whom he has believed, and is persuaded that He is able to keep that deposit*, which he has long ago committed to Him, *against the day of His appearing and His kingdom. Lord Jesus*—my Master, my Lord, my Ruler and my Possessor, already; long known, long trusted in, and now not doubted; Thou who didst bear my nature, and undergo more than all my suffering; Thou who wast named Jesus at Thy birth below, in testimony that Thou couldest save Thy people, first from the death of the soul, and then also at last in and from the death of the body—*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Today* let me *be with Thee in Paradise. Into Thy hands*, as Thou once upon the cross into Thy Father's, *I commend my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth. And so shall I ever be with my Lord.*

So then, my brethren, we may speak to Christ as to God. Whatsoever we would ask of the Father, we may ask of Him. And when we come to die, we may set before our mind's eye the person of the Son of God and Son of Man, and be assured that in leaning upon that arm of power, in trusting in that heart of love, we are but following His direction and obeying His command who would have *all men honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

(3) And as we dwell upon the two other attributes, of faith and hope, so may we notice, in the last place, the example here given us of an exhaustless charity. As the end approaches; as the buffeted tortured mangled frame begins to totter to its dissolution; the dying martyr kneels down upon the blood-stained earth, and collects every energy of soul and body for one last, one crowning act of worship. That posture with which we allow any little excuse to interfere, that reverent bending of the knee in God's worship, which many of us never practise even in God's House, which few of us would practise in a season of pain or sickness, he deemed the fittest attitude even for a dying man: he would honour God with his body as well as with his

spirit: and then, with a loud voice, the last utterance below of that testimony to which life had been devoted, he cries aloud, in the hearing of his enemies themselves as they stand with uplifted hands around, still thirsting for his blood, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.* He prays not, as some have done, that the murderers may find out their sin one day in punishment: he prays not even that the blood shed this day may produce a speedy and an abundant harvest: but he prays that that cruel deed which is still running on to its accomplishment may never be weighed in God's balances against the souls of its perpetrators. Thus he prayed; and in one case at least we know that his prayer was heard and answered. There was one at least among those murderers, to whom God afterwards *granted* the grace of *repentance unto life*, and who now for many centuries has rested with his victim, loved and loving, in the everlasting joys and the perfect charities of heaven. The prayer of the dying, we may well believe, is not the least but the most fruitful in legacies of conversion and salvation to the living. O let us, in life and in death, be diligent to use, one for another, the availing arm of intercession.

(4) *And when he had said this, he fell asleep.* What a word to apply to a death so violent and so suffering. *He fell asleep. He was laid to rest. He was lulled to slumber.* The word itself is enough to take the sting from death. If that is all that death is to the Christian, surely we may fear it too much. But, alas, the use of a word is not enough to deprive the king of terrors of his power to harm. We have all caught this tone about death. We speak indiscriminately of men going to their rest. Our word *cemetery* is borrowed from the same Greek term which is here employed to express the death of Stephen, and means literally a sleeping-place, a place of slumber and of repose. And yet dare we hope that all who are laid in that burial-ground are indeed sleeping in Jesus? Is that the hope which truly comforts every mourner, as he turns away from the grave in which his buried treasure lies?

The case of St Stephen himself may assure us that no circum-

stances of death can prevent its being this to a Christian. No anguish of pain, no confusion of surrounding sights and sounds, no mocking taunts and no assailing hands. It matters not whether the cause of death be disease or accident, the weapon of war or the stroke of the executioner. It matters not whether the scene of death be the house or the road-side, the field of battle or the desolate prison-house. These things do not either make or mar the true cemetery, the true sleeping-place of the Christian. When St Stephen at last breathed out his soul from a bruised and disfigured and mangled body, amidst shouts of execration and hands raised in murder, it is written of him in the words now before us, that *he fell asleep*.

Now it is a profitable question for our last this evening, For whom is death a sleep? Who amongst us can look forward to an end thus described? Let us ask the question, each one of himself, and also answer it, while to do so may still be salutary and not terrifying. There are three conditions of such a death.

i. It must be *a rest from labour*.

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: Even so, saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. An idle desultory self-indulgent life has earned no rest. Night may come to such a life; but not the sweet sleep of the diligent, not the profound dreamless repose of the healthily wearied labourer.

Again, a rest from what labour? Not from common worldly occupations, such as *have their reward* (if anywhere) here, and have nothing stored up for them in the world unseen. Not from the eager pursuit of riches or pleasures or honours, which, whether found or not found, are at least bounded and limited by the horizon of earth. Not from these labours does he rest in death, who, like the blessed saint before us, then falls asleep. He who would rest in Christ must first have wrought in Christ. It is Christ's labourer, not the world's, who, when he dies, falls asleep. Now therefore are we, in the present, working for Christ? Is He daily called in to bless our toil? remembered each morning at the outset of toil, as the alone Guardian and

Guide and Lord? remembered each day in the midst of toil, as its sustainer, its object, and its sanctifier? remembered each night at the close of toil, as its alone end and rest and *exceeding great reward?* If this be so, day by day; if this principle be thoroughly acted upon, in what it prompts and in what it precludes, through the days of health and activity; then indeed we may hope, when we die, not to perish, but to fall asleep.

ii. Again, it must be a *rest with Christ.*

When St Paul thought or spoke of dying, it was always in this connection. *I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and* (as a necessary consequence) *to be present with the Lord.* He who *falls asleep* in death must go, consciously and believingly, to be for ever with the Lord. *Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

iii. Finally, it is a condition of sleep that it be a *rest unto rising.*

The chief reason for its being a name of death is, that the Christian's death implies and involves a resurrection. *Jesus and the resurrection* was the sum of St Paul's doctrine. *The hope of Israel* he called it; *the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers.* A sleep not to be again broken is death, not sleep. A sleep only to be broken by terrific suffering is no sleep: it is a frightful dream, a horrible nightmare. Such is the death of the wicked; of him who through life has kept and loved his sins, and dies to *give account to Him who is the Judge of quick and dead.* God keep us all from such a life, and from such an end. May He give us rather such a deathbed as we have seen erenow in the exercise of our ministry; a protracted season, it may be, of acute bodily torture which rests not night nor day, yet, withal, of so sweet a peace, of so deep a joy, of so overflowing a thankfulness, that to enter that chamber is to lift the latch, for a moment, of the very gate of heaven, and to hear by anticipation the echoes of that world, in which the work of praise is the enjoyment of the blessed, and in which every tongue has learned

the new song, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* Of that man, when he dies, the words will indeed be verified, *He served his generation by the will of God, and then fell on sleep. When he had said this, he fell asleep.* Which one of us shall not answer—God grant that it be truly said of each one of us when our great change comes—*Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well?*

LECTURE XVI.

GOSPEL JOY.

ACTS VIII. 8.

And there was great joy in that city.

THE servants of God *live though they die.* And this, not only in reference to that world which they then first enter; but also in reference to this world which they then finally quit. What is said of one of these, is true more or less of all, *He, being dead, yet speaketh.*

It was so with that remarkable man whose life and death have occupied us on three late occasions. The passage before us illustrates the old saying, that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.' Stephen, after that unjust accusation, that bold defence, and that cruel execution, of which we have been reading, is not yet done with: that sacred stream did but water the soil on which it was poured, and a tenfold harvest of good soon waved and whitened, ripened and was gathered, on the ground now wet with that blood which was his life.

The first words indeed of this 8th chapter tell of nothing but calamity to the young Church of Christ. But calamity itself, in God's hand, may be anything rather than an unmixed evil: and so it was here.

And Saul was consenting to his slaughter. He uses the same word himself, in the 22nd chapter of this book, in converse with his Lord and Master, with reference to this very time. *When*

the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was being shed, I also myself was standing by, and consenting, and keeping the garments of those who were slaying him. It is a very strong word, expressive of hearty approval and thorough sympathy. It is the word by which the same Apostle describes the worst sign of all in the heathen world in its lowest degradation; *who, knowing well the sentence of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but even consent unto* (*have pleasure in*) *them that do them.* In this sense it is written here, that *Saul was consenting unto* (*taking pleasure in*) *the murder of* the holy Stephen. What he saw of his fervent faith, his deep piety, and his marvellous love, produced at the time no impression. Hard indeed is man's heart till God softens it. And marvellous is the change which God can work and does work in the hardest heart, when He is pleased to *command the light to shine out of darkness.* That time, for Saul, was not yet.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the Christian *congregation in Jerusalem.* This first taste of blood only whetted the appetite of the persecutors. That day was the beginning of a changed order of things for the infant Church. Hitherto there had been no general feeling against it on the part of the people. The very rulers had had to think twice before they lifted a hand against the Apostles. But human nature, as it acts in masses, is a very capricious thing: with Christ Himself it had been, in that selfsame populace, *Hosanna now, tomorrow Crucify:* and as with the Lord, so was it to be in all things with His servants. The martyrdom of Stephen was the signal for a general persecution.

And they all were dispersed throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria; and further still, as we shall presently learn; *except the Apostles.* They remained for the present at head-quarters, to be the central authority, the general referees, and the wise and watchful counsellors, of the whole body.

And devout men buried Stephen, and made a great lamentation (*wailing*) *over him.* This word *devout* is applied in St Luke's Gospel to the aged Simeon. *The same man was just and devout.*

It is applied, in the narrative of the day of Pentecost, to the persons who were gathered together by the rumour of the great miracle. *There were, dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.* The same term is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in reference to our Lord Himself praying in His agony in the garden of Gethsemane; *He was heard in that He feared; heard,* as it might more exactly be rendered, *from (in consequence of) His devoutness.* There is no reason therefore for restricting it here, as some would do, to Jewish proselytes not yet converted to the Gospel; though it might well be that, as Stephen appears (from his name, as well as from circumstances attending his appointment in the 6th chapter) to have belonged to the Hellenistic rather than the Hebrew portion of the Church, so the task of doing honour to his lifeless body may have been undertaken by persons of the same section; that, namely, which was composed of Greek-speaking Jews, and not of Jews who had adhered to their national home and tongue.

We love to believe, at all events, that these *devout men* were believers, like him whom they mourned; and that we see here the sanction of Apostolical times given to that mourning over deceased friends, which nature prompts and which grace should only regulate and soften. There are Christian tears over the dead, as well as tears of uncontrolled passion: there is a sorrowing *as without hope*, and there is a sorrowing full of hope, a sorrowing bright with immortality.

The sacred record will not let us forget Saul. Soon he is to become its chief topic: and it is as though the force of that contrast must be heightened by every just aggravation of his previous condition and character. While the lamentations of the devout are still resounding over the humble grave of St Stephen, Saul was the chief actor in a widely different scene. *But Saul was making havoc of the congregation;* was maltreating and outraging, by all manner of violence, the members of the Christian Church at Jerusalem; *entering into their several houses; and dragging (away) both men and women gave them over into custody.* There was no pretence of legality in such proceedings:

but he had the rulers with him in this mad career, and could rely confidently upon their connivance. We can never read these narratives of the persecutions of other days, without asking ourselves with all seriousness, (1) whether, if the profession of the Gospel involved such consequences for us, we can at all imagine ourselves maintaining our constancy as Christ's disciples; and (2) whether we ever remember to give God thanks for securing to us of this land and age the peaceful exercise of our religion; for so *ordering by His Providence the course of this world, that His Church now may joyfully serve Him in all godly quietness, no man forbidding them.*

And now we are to see a Divine hand overruling for good all this suffering.

They then that were dispersed went about proclaiming the glad tidings of the word. The word is God's message; the announcement which God makes when, as *in these last days*, He *speaks to us in His Son.* And this word is described as a *Gospel:* those who proclaim it proclaim *glad tidings.* Is that our idea of preaching and of hearing? Do we speak and do we listen, as if that which is being said were, as it ought to be, something not only true, not only important, but attractive and joyful too?

For a short time now the attention is to be directed to a new actor.

And Philip came down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. This is not Philip the Apostle, but that Philip who (together with Stephen) was one of the seven men chosen in the 6th chapter to assist the Apostles in the daily distribution. At a later time, in the 21st chapter, he is described as *Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven. He came down,* from Jerusalem the capital, *to the* (or, according to another reading of the sacred text, *to a*) *city of Samaria; and* there *began to proclaim to them*, as with the voice of a herald, summoning men to the Christian race and the Christian prize—such is the force of the original expression—began to act as the herald to them, not of a mere doctrine or a historical fact, but of a Person; even of Him, whose coming was the one hope of the world, the

Messiah or Christ, the anointed Prophet and Priest and King of Israel and of the world. That was his subject. He *preached Christ unto them.*

And not without success. *And the multitudes,* who formed the population of the city, *attended to the things spoken by Philip, with one accord, as they heard* his words *and saw the signs which he did.* As it is said of the first convert at Philippi some years afterwards, when Paul was the preacher, *the Lord opened* their *hearts, that* they *attended to those things which were spoken.* It was not a mere assertion to which they listened. *Not in word only, but also in power and in demonstration of the Spirit,* did Philip speak now, as Paul afterwards. The people not only heard his word, but they *saw the signs which he did.*

For many of those who had unclean spirits—the sentence is broken—*they* (the unclean spirits) *crying with a loud voice,* in token of reluctance and of compulsion, *came out: and many paralyzed and lame persons were healed.* Thus God gave testimony in this new place to the word of life. Persons tortured by the actual possession of evil spirits, were delivered from them in virtue of that voice which used the all-availing name of Christ. *Sitting at the feet* of their deliverer, *clothed and in their right mind,* they became witnesses to all men of the presence of His grace before whom the devils themselves tremble. And bodily cures also, in the form of deliverances from lameness and from paralysis, accompanied the other; that the very senses of men might be able to attest the reality of the Divine working.

And there arose much joy in that city.

Now let us gather up the chief topics of these few words.

1. It is the will of God to propagate His Son's Gospel. It is His intention that it should spread; and in all ways, through circumstances adverse to it or favourable, He gives it free course. Sometimes it is by opening the commerce of nations, so that the messengers of salvation may occupy new fields, and (in a larger sense than before) *sow beside all waters.* Sometimes it is by suffering a shortlived triumph to the enemies of the truth; so that some spark from a martyr's pile may kindle a

fire, in a land or in a heart, which by God's grace shall never be put out. It has been thus in all times. And great as has been the effect of the protection and patronage of kings and queens as the nursing fathers and mothers of the Church below, we may boldly say that it has been as nothing, in the long run, in comparison with that *constancy of faith even unto death*, of which all great epochs of the Church have furnished examples, even as the history of St Stephen himself was its first and most memorable instance. *They who were dispersed abroad, in the persecution which arose about Stephen, went everywhere preaching the word.* And by degrees the story of his life and of his death became incorporated in the word which they preached; and men were emboldened by that great example to look up to heaven in their own sufferings for the truth, and by faith to see that heaven opened, and Jesus Himself standing at the right hand of God. This was all that remained of the effects of the first Christian persecution; an added testimony, a wider circulation, and a more decided devotion.

Though we are not called, in these quiet times, to give our bodies to be burned for the testimony of the truth, yet we are called every one of us to assist in propagating the Gospel, not only by such offerings of gold and silver as are from time to time asked of us in that behalf, but even more, by so living and so dying as that others may take knowledge of us that we believe that which we profess, and love that which we believe. *This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us.* It is His will to propagate His Son's Gospel, from land to land, and not less from heart to heart.

2. But what is this Gospel? It is described in two expressions.

(1) First it is called *the word.* They *went everywhere preaching the word.* What is a word? It is the utterance of a mind. It is the communication of something first conceived. It is the expression of thought, of intention, of purpose, of determination. In its simplest and most general definition, it is, reason communicating itself. Do we indeed believe that the Gospel is this? the

expression of God's mind concerning us? the communication of His will, of His purpose, of His thought, so far as it affects us His human creation? It is a grand and glorious view which is thus opened. God has spoken; spoken concerning us, and spoken to us. That silence which had lasted from Creation is at length broken. That mystery which for ages and generations had enveloped the ulterior designs of the Almighty Creator touching His rebellious creatures is at last revealed, unveiled, disclosed, laid open. God has spoken; and what He has spoken is a Word. He has announced to us the forgiveness of sins through a Mediator and a Sacrifice. He has announced to us the sanctification of sinners, their recreation in His own lost image, by means of an indwelling Holy Spirit, Himself God and from God. He has announced to us that prayer, which is only speaking to Him in the heart, is the one connecting link between us and these two unspeakable gifts. And He has announced to us that it is His intention, when the fulness of the time shall come, to raise the dead and to change the living, so that the one and the other may be capable of an immortal existence, the character of which, for happiness or misery, will depend upon the mind here formed in us, and the life here led by us, as individual beings, capable of choice, and responsible for making it. These things are amongst the disclosures embodied in that word, or message, or communication from God, which these dispersed disciples preached throughout Judea and Samaria, and which we, if we be faithful to our commission, are preaching still and still hearing.

(2) But, as they preached *the word*, so Philip preached *Christ*. He *went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them*. There was no contrariety, no difference, between the two Gospels. Christ *is* the Word. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Jesus Christ is so designated because He is the utterer, the communicator, the Revealer of God. *No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.* The Word *is* Christ. To preach *Christ*, in His person, in His character, in His work; in His

example and in His atonement, and in His priesthood; in His two comings, and in His three comings; His coming to bear the sin of the world, His coming by the Spirit to the individual soul, and His coming in glorious majesty to judge the quick and the dead, and finally to establish His kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy; this is to proclaim God's *Word* also, in its simplicity, in its fulness, and in its strength.

Is this the Gospel which we preach? Is this the Gospel *which ye have received and wherein ye stand?*

3. And now, thirdly, as to the credentials of this Gospel: how is it proved?

When we preach the Word, or (which is the same thing) when we preach Christ, in a new place, or in one which has long had the light of life, how do we establish it? To what do we appeal as its basis of proof? No doubt we go back to the evidences: we speak of God's triple seal, of goodness, wisdom, and power, as set to the words and works below of Jesus Christ our Lord. These arguments are never worn out: nor can it ever be safe to disuse them, so long as one unbeliever remains, unconvinced and unconverted, amongst our people. But when our Lord said, *These signs shall follow them that believe*, He taught us to look for more than a mere historical proof, on which to build, for practical purposes, the fabric of our demonstration. When Philip preached in the city of Samaria, certain results followed: evil spirits came out of many, palsied limbs regained strength, and *the lame man* (in the language of ancient prophecy) *leaped as an hart.* Thus he could appeal to effects, and say, Judge ye whether a doctrine which brings with it these infallible signs, be indeed of man or of God. We are in one sense less fortunate. These visible tokens do not now attend our preaching. Not, as we hope, from any fault in the message or (necessarily) in the messenger, but of God's all-wise will, are these demonstrations of His power now withheld. We ought not to want them: and *if we hear not Moses and the prophets*, if we refuse the holy doctrine of Christ and the Apostles, neither should we be influenced by any outward sign; *neither should we be persuaded though one rose*

from the dead. These are not the signs for which we look and would pray in our hearers. But a changed life, an altered spirit; the leaving off of known sins, the correction of evil tempers, the eradication of hurtful lusts; the formation of Christian habits, and the diligent use of Christ's ordinances; *the table of devils* deserted, and the Table of the Lord frequented by humble and thronging worshippers; these are the true proofs of the Gospel Word in our days; by these things other men take knowledge of its power and of its virtue; in them do unbelieving men read the sure record of their condemnation, and the trembling fearful conscience the assurance of a free forgiveness for all who will *enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.* God give us in this place clearer signs, such as these, of the truth of the word preached, and make that word more and more identical with the proclamation of Christ Himself as *the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*

4. Finally, the text itself tells us what ought to be the effect of the proclamation, in any place, of the true and lively word. *There was great joy in that city.* It is long, we may fear, since in any whole place there was joy on account of the Gospel. One here, and another there; it is much if a long ministry shows fifty or even ten souls really brought to peace, and so to joy, by means of the preaching of the Word in any one Parish. We must go to humbler things, if we would speak probably. Let me ask then as to the individual soul, Which of you, my friends, knows what joy is in things spiritual? Which of you, in days of health and prosperity, finds any portion of his happiness simply in Christ? Which of you, in days of sickness and disappointment, in days when the lights of earth are darkened, does not find to his consternation that the light of heaven is gone out too? Not only in the city therefore, but in the heart also, there is no real joy, not even any real comfort, in the Word, in Christ. Joy is a very strong word. It is the overflowing of happiness. It is the exuberance, the redundancy, the efflorescence, of a comfort and a tranquillity habitually felt within. O where is Christian joy in these hearts of ours? such joy as that of which St Paul wrote, when he said,

Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice? or St John, *These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full?* or our Lord Himself, *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full?* Levity there may be, and too much of it; wit pungent or boisterous, sporting sometimes even with holy things; cheerful spirits in some, domestic happiness in some, contentment and even thankfulness in a few: but where amongst us is that grace of Christian joy which seemed to flow so naturally, in other days, out of the very first reception of the tidings of a Saviour? *He went on his way rejoicing. There was great joy in that city. Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* Let us pray, as for the first elements and rudiments of a true Christian faith, so also for its developement in us, and for its perfection; its perfection in a sober, a chastened, yet an abiding joy; in a happiness not only felt within, but expressed in every look and in every step and in every word without. Such joy lies nearer to any one of us than we imagine: sin forgiven, an evil spirit expelled; the atonement believed in, embraced, lived upon; the Holy Spirit sought, cherished, rested in for strength and grace; it is the natural effect of these things to inspire joy also: ask of God the power to grasp them as realities, and joy will enter with them; a joy not of this world, a joy the very foretaste of heaven.

LECTURE XVII.

THE SIN OF SIMON.

Acts viii. 22.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

In God's hand, we have seen, all things work for good. Prosperity and adversity, honour and dishonour, life and death, all alike serve Him.

If persecution springs out of martyrdom, still His overruling hand can make both the one and the other a help to the Gospel and a testimony to the truth. *They that were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen went everywhere preaching the word.*

Samaria was the first field thus opened. *Philip the evangelist, one of the seven,* went down thither and proclaimed Christ to them. We have heard what his message was, how supported, and by what signs followed. Diseases of body and diseases of soul fled, as ever, at the healing word of Christ. *And there was great joy in that city.*

Now we are to see the Gospel in one of its conflicts; one of those unexpected and insidious attacks, which try most severely the strength of the truth, but out of which God's overruling hand ever brings victory for those who trust in Him and fear not.

But a certain man, by name Simon, was already in the

city practising sorcery, and astounding the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was some great one; to whom they attended —it is the same word used in the 6th verse with reference to the effect of Philip's preaching, *the people with one accord gave heed* (or *attended*) *to those things which Philip spake—from small to great*, all ranks and all ages alike, *saying, This man is that power of God which is called great.* If we may believe the fragments of information which we have concerning this Simon, he seems to have given himself out as an incarnation of the Almighty power of God. *And they attended to him, because for a long time he had astounded them by his sorceries. But when they believed Philip announcing the glad tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name*, the revealed character, *of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.* They passed under a new and mightier influence, and were unable to resist the call, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*

A strange result followed. *And Simon himself also believed, and having been baptized he attended constantly upon Philip*, he remained stedfast in his attendance upon Philip's ministry—it is the same expression which occurs in the 2nd chapter with regard to the converts on the day of Pentecost, *they attended constantly upon the Apostles' doctrine* (*teaching*)—*and beholding signs and great miracles*, manifestations of power, *taking place he was astounded.* Here was conviction, confession, attention, acquiescence in loss of power and precedence, change of opinions, change of habits: what lacked he yet?

And the Apostles in Jerusalem—all were scattered abroad, the 1st verse of the chapter told us, *except the Apostles*, who remained in Jerusalem, ready for any such emergency as now arose—*on hearing that Samaria had received the word of God, sent unto them Peter and John*, on a special mission of enquiry and action; *who went down*, from the capital, *and prayed concerning them that they might receive the Holy Spirit: for not even yet was He fallen upon any one of them, but only they were already baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.* They were already possessed of the elementary grace of the Spirit; they had *repentance unto life;* they had faith

in Christ, and the spirit of prayer; but they had not yet received the Pentecostal gift, with its higher and deeper indwelling, as well as its outward manifestation in signs of power. *Then laid they their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

Now let us observe the effect of this event upon one professed member of the Church.

And when Simon saw that by means of the laying on of the hands of the Apostles the Spirit was given —was being given, given in one case after another—*he offered them money, saying, Give me also this authority*, this which I see to be your peculiar endowment, *that on whomsoever I may lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit.* He desired to purchase with money the Apostolical power of communicating (instrumentally) the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thus was brought out, in a form not offensive only but blasphemous, the mercenary spirit of the man. Money was his god. He judged of others by himself; sought to bribe the Apostles to share their commission with him; and indicated by an infallible sign the gross earthliness of his whole conception of the work and of the character of God.

But Peter said unto him, Thy money be with thee unto destruction —away with thy money, thy *mammon of unrighteousness*, intruding itself into the affairs of God and eternity; may it perish, as thou wilt *except thou repent—because thou didst think to acquire by means of money the gift of God. Thou hast not part nor lot*, neither share nor inheritance, *in this word*, in this matter in question; *for thy heart is not straight*, is not direct, straightforward, upright, but crooked and insincere, *before (in the sight of) God. Repent therefore from*—so as to turn away, to escape, from—*this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if then* —if as the result of that prayer—*the device of thy heart shall be dismissed (forgiven) for thee: for I see that thou art unto* (involved in) *a very gall of bitterness*, a concentration and focus of bitterness; even of that state of sin, which, however it may regard itself, is indeed *an evil thing and bitter—and bond (fetter) of iniquity.* I see that thy case is one of deadly disease; that thou canst not *deliver thy soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?*

Thy only chance is prayer; prayer for a free forgiveness, prayer for a renewing Spirit.

And Simon answered and said, Pray ye—the *ye* is emphatic, *ye, not I—for me to the Lord, that nothing come upon me of the things which ye have said.*

They then, having protested (*earnestly declared* or *asseverated*) *and spoken the word of the Lord, set out on their return to Jerusalem, and* on their way *evangelized* (*preached the glad tidings to*) *many villages of the Samaritans.*

1. On a general view of this passage, notice first the difference between the Gospel miracles and those of a mere magician like this Simon.

Power by itself is an ambiguous sign. There are other powers in the world besides God's. Powers which have broken loose from God. Powers which oppose God's. Powers which God permits, for a time, for the trial of His people, and for the overthrow of those who will not be His people. Such a power was that exercised by this sorcerer. It came, we may say, by itself; as a disjointed isolated thing; for the exaltation of a creature; to make beholders say, *This man is the great power of God.* It did not come to attest anything. It did not come to say, I have a message for you from God; and if you ask how you are to know that it is from God, this is the sign. That is the true use of power, in connection with Divine truth. It ought to come as the third part of God's triple seal: first goodness, then wisdom, then power. That was the use which Jesus Christ made of power. He did not come to startle men into acknowledging Him as *the great power of God:* His work did not begin there, nor end there. He began by showing forth in daily life a perfect holiness; an entire self-control and self-devotion; a spotless unimpeachable righteousness of act and word. He fulfilled every relation, He endured every trial, of human life, as no mere man ever did or ever could fulfil or endure each. He drew from his very enemies the confession, *Never man spake like this man.* And then, along with these two (we may presume to say) higher and more unequivocal signs, He also wrought miracles of power: healed disease with a

word, stilled wind and wave at His pleasure, cast out devils, raised the dead. At last, He raised *Himself* from the dead. Now this has never been the order of an impostor. He may astound men, like Simon, by his sorceries; he may avail himself of Satan's strength, and in that strength *do many wonderful works:* but you may be quite sure that he will never use the power of Satan to overthrow Satan's kingdom: nor can he gain from all the powers of darkness skill to clothe himself in the armour of light. He may *bewitch men with sorceries:* but he will never succeed in counterfeiting those other parts of God's seal, which the truly candid and the truly wise will wait for before they call either him or his *the great power of God.*

We are all in danger of too much worshipping power. Money is power, and talent is power, and rank is power, and office is power, and knowledge (above all) is power. But all these things are of the earth, and will perish with the earth. Be not ye led astray. Power-worship is too often devil-worship: this Simon, with all his show, was a creature grovelling and crawling and creeping among things of time and sense. Let the power you worship be all God's power. You will know it by its signs. You will know it by its pointing upward; by its drawing you towards holiness, towards good, towards charity, towards heaven, towards God; you will know it by its making the unseen world real to you, and the world of show and semblance less attractive. That is the effect of God's power, as it is reflected even in the poor imperfect characters of His children below: how much more, as it shines in the Holy Book, or streams upon us from the mercy-seat above *in the face of Jesus Christ.*

2. Again, we must recognize in this narrative what we are all slow to acquiesce in, the existence amongst us, by Christ's intention, of a Visible as well as an Invisible Church.

We see how men fight against this truth. We have all heard of Christian people endeavouring to make for themselves a circle within a circle, a Church within a Church; a little community, inside the great Church of the baptized and professing Christians, which shall be all sincere, all consistent, all holy, all saved. That

has been the origin of most sects in the Church: men have been weary of the formality and hypocrisy and heartlessness which had taken possession of the visible fold below, and have sought to go apart with a few, of whose consistency and devotion they could be assured. And men will scoff at our Church of England, as having held to the belief that the time for judging is not yet, and the test of judgment in God's hand not ours. If we bury a careless, worldly, or sinful man with words of hope and blessing, because he has never been cast out of the Church by a formal sentence, and must therefore be construed as still belonging to it, however unworthy; you know the outcry which is raised against us by many who ought, we think, to know better; ought, we think, to remember that even in the first days of the Gospel there was a Simon Magus baptized by Philip the Evangelist, and recognized as a member, though an unworthy member, of the Christian community by two of the Apostles themselves. *Let both grow together until the harvest* is the rule of Divine wisdom as much as of Divine forbearance. If you attempt to judge, you will err both ways: you will often be taken in by loud profession, you will oftener be driven into uncharitableness, into harshness, into injury of souls. Simon was allowed to be baptized, because he said that he was convinced by Philip's miracles that Jesus was Christ. Simon was allowed to attend upon Philip's ministry, and to partake in all the ordinances of Christian communion, on the strength of his own profession, and in the expectation of a higher and a truer judgment.

We do well to allow this latitude to others, and we do well to claim it for ourselves. While the day of grace lasts, we must shut out from hope and from privilege no one who desires and claims either. And if others were to sit in judgment upon us, where should *we* be? How often have we been inconsistent, worldly, careless, sinful. How often must even a human judgment upon us, if it was to be, have been unfavourable, severe, condemning. And yet it would have been the worse for us to be shut out prematurely: we have been the better, every one of us, or we might have been, for that forbearance which has given us

time and space for amendment: till the curtain falls upon life's little drama, man is bound to hope, because God has not yet spoken in judgment. May He give us grace to use the opportunity thus vouchsafed.

For indeed we know that, under all this profession, all this which man is bound to respect, and to treat (while he can) as if it were genuine, there is an eye upon the heart. It is not that this unchallenged profession really implies a favourable issue. There is One who sees all our false ways, and *that which is highly esteemed among men is* often *an abomination in the sight of God.* Yes, we need patience, but we need severity too; patience from others, severity from ourselves, and a union of both from God. We are bold, and we are also timorous; bold in sinning, then timorous in repenting: and we need both the ready baptism of the Evangelist, taking us on our profession, and also the stern rebuke of the Apostle, bidding us to repent deeply of our wickedness, if perhaps the thought of our heart may be forgiven us.

3. Once more, let us ask ourselves what was this particular sin which required in the case before us so stern a reproof. Simon offered money to the Apostles to share their gift with him. He would purchase the Holy Ghost with money. The very idea is blasphemy. We all shrink from it. The law of this land calls a particular offence, that of trafficking in the care of souls, of buying and selling sacred offices in the ministry, by a name derived from that of this man, *Simony.* It were well if that offence were more clearly defined, more strictly interpreted, and less easily evaded. But need I say that this is not the only nor the chief sense in which we can be guilty of the sin of Simon? We are not tempted to offer money in purchase of God's spiritual gifts: but we are tempted, many of us, to that state of mind out of which Simon's sin, in his ignorant condition, naturally sprang. Simon had that mercenary mind which St Paul calls the *root of all evil.* He thought that money could do anything. He deified money. Knowing what it was to him; how he taught for money, and practised sorcery for money, and aimed at popularity for money, and set himself up as *some great one* for money; he took

it for granted that every one else regarded money in the same way: he came to two Apostles, and assumed that they, like himself, thought nothing too great and nothing too holy to be bargained about and trafficked for. Alas, *let him that is without sin among you* in this matter *cast the first stone* at him. Alas, what an idolatry of money is there in a Christian land, in the Christian Church. What revelations are daily made of the light in which we look at money. If there are none now who seek to buy God's gifts with money, at least are there not some who consent to sell their own souls for money? O these dishonesties in trade, in speculation, in trusts, yes, even in charity! If we really cared for God's gifts, I can even fancy that some of us might offer money for them. If we do not offer money for God's gifts, is it not because we care ten thousand times more for things which money can purchase? Money can get a luxurious table, a well-furnished house, a gay equipage; or, if there is not enough for these, at least it can buy us a humbler or a coarser kind of bodily indulgence: it can do more; it can buy consideration, it can buy flattery, it can buy fawning and cringing, it can buy a thousand attentions while we live, and a few crumbs of gratitude when we lie low in death. But I will tell you what no money can buy: it cannot buy any one of God's highest gifts; it cannot even buy health, or eyesight, or comeliness; it cannot buy the affection of one human being; it cannot buy repose of conscience, hope in death, or a single ray of the sweet and secret and supporting love of God. And therefore a man who learns by long habit to think that money is everything is as much what the Scripture calls a fool as he is what the Scripture counts a sinner. That thoroughly mercenary mind is one of the very lowest and most debased types of the fallen human character. That is the real sin of Simony. It is the state of one who has allowed every trace of the Divine to be eaten out of him by the perishable. It is the state of one who thinks that religion itself is a sort of separable external gift, a thing which may be got whole, and put on and worn as a sort of cloke or girdle. The idea of a change of heart, of a new creation, of a gradual, a growing, at last a complete

transformation of the mind and soul after God's image, after Christ's likeness; of this he has no conception. If, when he lies on his deathbed, he can command the services of a clergyman, as he can command the services of his lawyer and his physician, that, he thinks, is enough to fit him for his long journey: *Give me also*, he says, *this power*, that I may receive, without having sought, the gift of acceptance with God and eternal life. This is the very sin of Simon. It is the being altogether of the earth, and yet expecting to have heaven too. It is the bringing all that is base and mean and corruptible, and expecting to receive—not in exchange for it, but along with it—all that is spiritual and eternal and Divine. To such a spirit it may well be said, *Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.* Yes, *pray God:* He is *very pitiful, and of tender mercy:* He can unwrap from the soul its long habit of a grovelling worldliness, and give even to the covetous and the mercenary His unspeakable gift of repentance unto life.

4. You have heard to-day the announcement—always one of interest and anxiety in parochial life—of an approaching Confirmation. The passage now before us tells of a laying on of hands, with special prayer for the gift of God's Holy Spirit, at a time subsequent to Baptism. The Evangelist could baptize: but this imposition of hands was reserved for the Apostles alone. We do not say that that imposition of hands was exactly our service of Confirmation. A Bishop is not an Apostle; and the supernatural gifts which then followed, are now neither asked nor given. Still we say that at least a suggestion is here made, which our Church has done wisely to act upon. It is a practice strongly commending itself to right reason as well as to Christian experience, that, when a person has been dedicated to God by others in an ordinance of Baptism administered in infancy, he should be called upon at a later time to make that unconscious dedication his own by choice; should be required, after due instruction, to say, before Christ and the Church, whether he desires to be a Christian indeed; and should then be solemnly

commended to God's perpetual care and guidance by the chief officer of the Christian body, with an earnest invocation upon him of all the manifold gifts of grace. That is Confirmation. It is the coming of age of a Christian man. It is the sealing upon him of all the privileges and all the responsibilities of Church membership. It is his gate of admission to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. It is the entrance upon a conscious, a deliberately chosen, Christian life. That is Confirmation. God grant that it be this, all this, to many amongst us at this time. I would charge it upon all who have children or servants not yet confirmed, and of a suitable age for that act of consecration, to lose no time in sending their names to their ministers, and then to be careful in securing to them every opportunity of attending the course of preparatory instruction soon to be begun. And let the prayers of the congregation go up, week by week and day by day, from this time forward, that God may be pleased so to bless both the preparation and the service, that many new members may be added to our worshippers and our communicants, and many souls gathered also into that invisible community, of which it is written that it is *a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, offering up spiritual sacrifices*, and *showing forth*, in word and deed, *the praises of Him who hath called it out of darkness into His marvellous light.*

LECTURE XVIII.

A SPECIAL MISSION.

Acts viii. 30.

Understandest thou what thou readest?

The Apostles Peter and John had set out on their return to Jerusalem. In those villages of the Samaritans, upon one of which St John, in the days of his ignorance, had proposed to his Master that they should *call down fire from heaven to consume them* for their unbelief, the same blessed Apostle and Evangelist was now preaching the glad tidings of a Saviour crucified for their sin and risen again for their justification. What a change have two short years wrought in that man. Two years before, his Master had had to turn and rebuke him, saying, in words of unusual severity, to him and to his brother, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* Now he did know. Now he had fully *drunk of* that *Spirit*, whose fruits are *first pure, then peaceable.*

Meanwhile Philip, of whose ministry as the Evangelist of Samaria we have been lately reading, receives a new commission full of interest.

And an angel of the Lord (Jehovah) spake unto Philip, saying, Arise—the usual call to exertion—*and go southwards to the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza: it is desert.*

The mode of communication is not stated, and we have no other guide than the words themselves. One of those *ministering spirits* who are *sent forth*, the Scripture tells us, *to minister to the*

heirs of salvation, was employed to convey to Philip, whether in sleep or by a waking summons, the intimation of duty. He was to go southwards, till he fell into a road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza, a Philistian city, near the coast of the Mediterranean, south-west of Jerusalem. The road is described as *desert*. Geographers say that there were two roads from Jerusalem to Gaza; one through towns and villages, the other taking a shorter cut across the desert. It was necessary, if so, that the message should specify one of these. And the one specified was (as is often the case in God's commissions of duty) the less probable of the two. What work could an Evangelist find in a wilderness? Send him to towns; bid him preach the word in cities; there he may find large audiences, and hope for great successes: but in a desert—what shall he find there of work for Christ? He will see. Through obedience comes enlightenment; in obedience is success.

Philip was of this character. He *stumbled* not *at the word being disobedient*. Therefore he had his reward.

And he arose and went. He struck into the road indicated in the message, and was left, perhaps, to traverse it for some time ignorant of the cause wherefore he was sent.

And behold, there was *an Ethiopian, an eunuch, a chief officer of Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to worship at Jerusalem, and he was* now *returning* towards his own country, *and seated on his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.*

That he was a proselyte to the Jewish faith is evident; he had visited Jerusalem on this occasion as a worshipper; and he was engaged in reading the Old Testament Scriptures. This is all we know. What opportunities he had had, on this or any previous visit to Jerusalem, of hearing of Jesus Christ; how far he had been guilty of turning a deaf ear to previous calls of the Gospel; this we know not: and in the absence of any such information we do well rather to dwell upon the lineaments of his character, as it is drawn for us in this narrative. We see him a serious, enquiring, candid man; a student of God's Holy Word;

not ashamed on a journey to be seen and heard reading it, not pleading business or rank or office as an excuse for neglected worship or preoccupied thoughts.

Isaiah must have been to all pious Israelites the Gospel of the Old Testament. It opened a glorious prospect of Him that should come, and of the latter days of Israel and of the Church. To him our Lord turned for a text for His first discourse at Nazareth; *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor;* and said of it, *This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.* And the Ethiopian, who would *know God better than he knew*, took the same Prophet for his teacher, and in studying him found himself unexpectedly *taught of God.* Very precious are these links between the old and the new; very sacred the associations which gather round that blessed page in which holy and righteous men of old found themselves initiated beforehand in the mysteries of faith and of the Gospel.

And now Philip's work is opening before him, and he is to find in his own experience that God does nothing and commands nothing in vain.

And the Spirit said to Philip, Approach, and join thyself to this chariot. Let it not escape thee: keep close to it: it is to be thy pulpit and thy Church this day. See how near the Spirit is to God's messengers, to Christ's servants; how distinct and how minute were His directions and His prohibitions to them of old: if He speaks not now with equal precision, it is (in part at least) because we walk not with Him as closely.

And Philip ran up to it, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. The Ethiopian was a stranger to him and a foreigner; in rank and wealth and consequence he was by far his superior: but what then? he had a message to him, a Divine message, and it must be delivered. But not rudely, not abruptly: he takes occasion from his occupation, and begins with a question, not of trifling things, the news or the weather, yet still in a tone of courtesy, and as one who would rather counsel than command.

And he said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And the

other said, Why, how could I, unless some one shall guide me? And he besought Philip to get up and sit down with him.

Every one notices the humility, candour, and courtesy, which breathed in the answer and in the request accompanying it. As if he had said, I am but an ignorant man in divine things: my work has lain in matters of earthly business; and though I worship God and read His word, yet I need instruction and an instructor: by thy question I perceive that thou art beyond me in the things of God: give me thy company on the way, and we will commune together upon the word of truth. My brethren, we lose much by our reserve towards strangers: if in entertaining strangers *some have entertained angels unawares*, so in communicating with strangers, in the house and by the way, some have found either another's soul to save, or else an Evangelist to enlighten their own. The Ethiopian might have repelled Philip's question as an intrusion and an impertinence: in welcoming him as a teacher and an expositor, he found salvation come to his house and to his soul.

Now the section of the Scripture which he was reading was this: you can read it still in our beloved 53rd chapter of Isaiah: *As a sheep was He led to slaughter, and as a lamb voiceless before his shearer, so He openeth not His mouth* in complaint, in murmuring, or in remonstrance: *in His humiliation His judgment was taken away;* that is, in the season of His self-abasement and submission He was deprived of the commonest conditions of a fair trial: *His generation who shall describe?* who shall tell the wickedness and the violence of the men of that generation which rejected and slew him? *for His life is taken away from the earth.* The words are difficult and ambiguous: taken from the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, they differ in some respects from the Hebrew original, and therefore also from our Authorized Translation: even as they here stand, some would render them differently. But our business now is rather with their general sense than with their minute interpretation.

And the eunuch answered Philip and said—that is, said in reference to the words read from Isaiah—*I pray thee, of whom*

doth the prophet say this? of himself, or of some one else? The question strikes us as an ignorant one: but, alas, how many, even in our own day, even in a Christian Church, are still asking it! *And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, told him the glad news of Jesus.* So then there was no doubt in those days what the 53rd chapter of Isaiah meant. It was not thought impossible then that *holy men of God* should *speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* It has been reserved for these times to discard from the evidences of our faith both miracle and prophecy. Let us not seek to be *wise above what is written*, but cling with thankful hope to all that God has given us in proof of His Son.

And as they went on the way, they came to some water—not a common object on that desert journey—*and the eunuch saith, Behold*, here is *water: what hinders my being baptized?* It is natural to suppose that Philip, in preaching Jesus, had mentioned His ordinance of Baptism; had quoted, perhaps, to him the well-known promise, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved:* and in the growing confidence of his new faith, the Ethiopian would fain satisfy at once the outward as well as the inward condition of salvation: when, if not now, could he hope for either a Christian teacher or a Christian baptist?

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It is more than doubtful whether this verse is really a part of the text. It is not found in the best manuscripts. And we may thank God that we are not dependent upon it for any doctrine. We know well, from other passages, what was the one requisite for Christian Baptism; the confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as the Son of Man. Whether therefore the words before us be in or out, we shall equally know that the Ethiopian did confess the faith of Christ before his Baptism, and was admitted, on the strength of that profession, to the sacrament of Christian incorporation.

And he commanded that the chariot should stop; and they went down, both of them, into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and

he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no longer; for he went on his way rejoicing. Whether by a sudden inward summons to depart, like that by which he had been commanded to come; or by a miraculous withdrawal, such as God could employ, in this or any other case, at His pleasure; further communication was precluded between the convert and his evangelist: the work was done for which Philip came; *the work of faith with power*, the work of an abiding conversion, the work of love and hope and great joy: the Ethiopian *saw him no more;* and it mattered not; he stayed not to seek or to murmur; *for he went on his way rejoicing. And Philip was found at Azotus:* when next he was seen, it was there, twenty miles northward from Gaza; *and passing through, he evangelized all the cities,* proclaimed his glad tidings in every place through which he journeyed, *till he came to Cæsarea.* There, at a distant day, we shall hear of him again.

Meanwhile let us gather up some of those truths which *he being dead yet speaks* to us in this history.

1. And first one brief word as to the practical care of God for the individual souls of men.

The object of all this whole transaction; this call, this journey, this preaching, this baptism; was one single conversion, one single salvation. Surely we see in it a proof, not only that God *will have all men to be saved,* but that He will have each man separately to be saved. With thankfulness may we rest, as upon the universality, so upon the minuteness, of God's love and of God's care for us. None of us can say that he is too insignificant for God's regard. See what God did for this stranger; how He raised up an Evangelist for him, and marvellously threw him in his way, on purpose that he, he personally, he individually, might see salvation. The course of human life is still full of these interventions, of these special calls and missions. Look into your own life, and can you not see some such dealing of God even with you?

And then we should notice how it is through such single

several agencies that the work of God, His chief and most abiding work, is ever wrought in our world. The Gospel has some, yea, many influences of a more general nature upon human life and human affairs. We do well to recognize these, and to give thanks for them. But the truest, highest, deepest work of God is wrought through the thorough inward change of individual hearts. Each soul that is really brought thus to God becomes in its turn a little centre of light and life, from which shines forth the truth and the grace, the illumination and the persuasion, which is to draw others also after Him. We must never count any time wasted, that is spent upon the instruction and the conviction and the correction of one human being. That work, if it be genuine, if it be heart-deep, is a work, not of a narrow isolated character, but of extended, it may be of large and wide influence, upon the cause of Christ and of the Gospel in the world around. And let no man count his own soul's culture a thing of trifling moment. He too, if he be indeed brought to God, may be in his turn the Evangelist, if not of a nation, yet at least of a family, at least of some one precious human soul. Thus, even thus, does God work: happy are they who thus, even thus, can work with Him

2. Secondly, as to the importance of being always ready for duty.

Your feet shod, St Paul writes, *with the preparation of the Gospel of peace*. It is one part of the Christian armour; a Gospel readiness for action. Philip had to take a long journey in quest of one convert. Nay, without knowing beforehand that he was to make one convert. He was told to go and strike into a road which was desert. O what excuses, what answerings again, should we have made in reply to such a call! How should we have urged the disproportion between the means and the end; the distance, the difficulty, the improbability, the waste of strength and time; till at length we should have gone one degree further, and persuaded ourselves that we never were called to it, that there had been a mistake, that God had not spoken. It was not thus with the blessed Evangelist before us. *He went forth, not know-*

ing whither he went. He only knew that the call was clear, and that God was allwise.

God does not now speak to us by an Angel, or say expressly by a voice within, Go here or go there. Yet, besides His more obvious commands as to the fulfilment of duty and as to the avoidance of sin, you all know that there is often something within you which says, There is such or such a person whom you might benefit in soul or body, such or such a friend whom you have lately neglected, such or such a poor neighbour whom you might visit for comfort or cheering or counsel. These monitions are akin (though in a humble degree) to the call which reached Philip, *Arise, and go toward the south.* And these inward promptings are easily resisted. They do not come to us exactly in the form of injunctions or prohibitions. They are rather suggestions, optional suggestions, which it is not apparently a sin to put aside. In the same degree are they the better tests and touchstones of our Christianity. They say to us, Here is something which you might do for your Saviour. Perhaps it may fail; but there is a chance also of its succeeding. If you feel your debt to Him as you ought, you will go and do it. At the same time I do not say that you will sin if you do it not. And this alternative, this liberty to go or not to go, this absence of command and yet suggestion of a possible good, shows an honest man what he is. If he always finds an excuse for putting it aside; if he always persuades himself that he is not called to it; if he is glad when something occurs to make it for the time impossible; if he rejoices in discovering that weather or business or health has taken off from him the burden of present duty; then he should indeed suspect strongly the nature or the vitality of his faith; he has upon him at present the mark of the unprofitable servant, who was satisfied to *dig in the earth, and hide his Lord's money.*

On the other hand, how frequently—not always, but frequently—is an effort of this kind consciously rewarded! You have roused yourselves to leave your warm fireside; you have walked through rain or snow to the poor man's cottage, or you have dragged yourself, indisposed and weary, to the home of some dull

and uncongenial acquaintance; and you regarded it all as a penance, or as a good deed to be put down to your reckoning: how often have you found that that day was one on which your visit was singularly seasonable; it was a day of peculiar distress, of unusual loneliness, of absolute destitution, to the person whom you sought out: or else it was a day on which the heart long closed was opener than ever before to the word and to the love of Christ, and it was your happiness to be an evident instrument in God's hand for the refreshment or encouragement or restoration of a human soul for which Christ died and rose. These things, not indeed to be reckoned upon or looked for, yet are God's occasional means of giving to him that hath, of drawing onward in the path of love one who has just set his first foot upon it, of showing us that *His service is perfect freedom*, that *in keeping of His commandments there is great reward.*

3. And next as to the importance of being always in pursuit of good.

Philip was ready to go: the Ethiopian was prepared to receive him. He was studying and musing over God's Word. He was trying to make it out and to put it together; trying to read on till he should understand; eager to hail a new teacher, however humble his rank or however alien his race. *To him that hath shall be given.* That is God's rule. If we would have, we must use. This man had an Old Testament. You scarcely know, possessing the New Testament also, how dark the sayings of the Old must have been to him without it. Many of us would have said—for we say it now—I can make nothing of the Old Testament. It only puzzles me: it makes my darkness darker, and my ignorance more ignorant. I will let it alone. But so did not the Ethiopian nobleman. He, like Simeon, like Nathanael, like older saints still of whom we have the record in the Bible, *desired to look into* the mysteries of the ancient Scriptures, *searched* with themselves *what or what manner of time*, what or what manner of event, the inspiring *Spirit did signify, when it testified beforehand* of things that should be hereafter, and pointed men's thoughts onward to the expectation of One that should come.

And therefore they saw what to others was mere confusion. *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.* Half the revelations of God depend upon the piety and reverence of him who receives them. There is a growth in knowledge proportionate to a growth in grace.

Many of us err grievously, at last err fatally, in this respect. We have no patience, and we have no humility, in the things of God. When we are asked, *Understandest thou what thou readest?* we answer confidently, *I see*, and therefore our blindness becomes permanent. *How can I except some man should guide me?* how hopeful, and how rare, is that answer. No: we take it for granted that in God's truth a thing must either be self-evident or unimportant. In this one, this greatest science of all, we consider study superfluous. And yet there is probably no part of God's revelation, which is intelligible (spiritually, I mean) to a superficial study. When first we enter that sacred chamber, fresh from the glaring lights and tinsel vanities of this world, all is darkness; we can discern nothing; we are ready to say there is nothing to discern. Wait awhile. Habituate your eye to that shade. By degrees a faint glimmering of light will reward your patience. In an hour you begin to distinguish objects, and to move amongst them freely. If you had gone out at once in your first disappointment, what would you not have missed? Read on now in that holy page; new light will be thrown upon it day by day: in a year you will marvel at your first incredulity: and when the question comes again to you, *Understandest thou what thou readest?* you will be ready to answer, *Not I, but the grace of God which is with me.*

Thus are the words verified in every age, *Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.* Again and again has the Bible been its own interpreter to those who studied it as in God's presence. Wonderful are the reports of those who have seen, in foreign lands or in our own, what the unaided Book can do for the humble and the earnest-minded. God shines upon the page by His Spirit, and there comes forth from it at last a marvellous light. Not to supersede

the human teacher, but to prepare the ground for him; to give him the joyful surprise of saying, *This hath God done, perceiving that it is His work;* for the confirmation of his faith as of all who shall hear his testimony; it is found again and again that God has thus, by His own Scriptures alone, *out of the very mouth of babes perfected strength, that He may still* the arrogant pride of *the enemy and the avenger.*

4. Lastly, the narrative before us illustrates the importance, both for strength and for comfort, of holding a simple Gospel.

Many of us pass through life without one single experience of the effect of the Gospel upon this stranger. We are so mistaught, or else so slow to learn; we are so afraid of presumption, and so fond of adding something of our own to the work and word of God; that we never reach anything that can call itself *the glad tidings of Jesus*, or send us forth *on our way rejoicing.* What Philip preached, what the Ethiopian received, was something which needed but one conversation for its statement, and but one hour for its reception. Evidently it was the simple declaration of a Saviour; a Saviour complete in His work for man; a Saviour, Himself our Propitiation, our Righteousness, and our Strength; our Sacrifice for sin, our Example of holiness, our Almighty Enabler and Renewer by His holy and indwelling Spirit. This is what Philip preached. *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* That is the Gospel, as God sent it, as Christ ratified it, as the Evangelists and Apostles preached it. Out of this Gospel flows all peace and all strength. Alas, we have added to it, and we have subtracted from it, till its vital energy is lost. God give us grace, ere it be too late, to call it back. There is none other. Any other Gospel is destitute of God's strength, because destitute of God's wisdom. No other Gospel is *the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* By that test shall ye know *the precious from the vile.* Take Christ wholly for your Saviour: see yourself lost, see Him an entire Propitiation; ask of God to receive you as you are, and to look

upon you only in Christ: and upon you, in the same proportion, will arise in no long time a glorious light: in you will be fulfilled, as in thousands before you, the memorable words, *Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength... In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

II.

THE CHURCH OF THE GENTILES.

LECTURE I.

THE WONDERFUL CONVERSION.

ACTS IX. 11.

Behold, he prayeth.

CONVERSION is a word on many lips. And it is a good word; it comes from the Holy Scriptures, and it denotes a transition from death to life.

We are to read of a conversion now. Let us ponder it well. Let us mark its beginning, course, and end; its first sign, and its last; *Behold, he prayeth;* and, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away, behold, they are become new.* Conversion is first a change of mind, and secondly a change of life.

The conversion of which we are now to read, was an event concerning *us* in no common degree. To it we of this land probably owe our Christianity. Let us hope that we owe more to it than even this: not only a light around, but a light within; not only the knowledge of a Gospel, but the possession of a Saviour.

We have heard of the person before. At the cruel execution of Stephen he was a consenting and approving bystander. He *kept the raiment of them that slew him.* No ray of conviction seems to have visited his mind in consequence of what he then witnessed. The words of Stephen, his calm and bold defence, his

dying prayer for his murderers, his dying testimony to the manifested glory of Christ, as he saw Him standing in the opened heaven at the right hand of God, none of these things then moved him: he still *made havoc of the Church;* he still *persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it;* he still *persecuted them oft in every city, compelling them to blaspheme.* And yet in all this he was but acting *ignorantly in unbelief.* He was fulfilling our Lord's prophecy, *Yea, the time cometh, when he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service.* But there was an eye over him through all this; a hand controlling, and soon to coerce; a voice saying, in a tone not to be withstood, *Thus far shalt thou come, and no further.*

The narrative is introduced in contrast with a different spirit and a different journey. Philip had been sent on a commission, not from the Sanhedrin, but from God Himself; not to persecute Christ's people, but to add to them; not to carry chains and death, but to convey peace and joy into a burdened and benighted heart.

But Saul, unlike him, *still breathing of threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord, came to the high priest, and asked from him letters to Damascus to the synagogues,* addressed to the officers of the various Jewish synagogues in Damascus, *that if he found any persons to be of the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

The state of Saul's mind at the outset of this journey is described in very strong terms. He was *still breathing of threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.* His every breath was menace and murder. To such lengths may prejudice and self-opinion carry even a conscientious man.

The object of his journey was to discover any persons belonging to *the way.* This is an expression often met with in the Acts. Sometimes it is called *the way of salvation;* sometimes *the way of the Lord;* sometimes *the way of God;* sometimes, as here, more briefly, *the way.* True religion, it reminds us, is not idleness, but exertion; not sitting still, but going forwards. We are all on our way somewhither; and in that way we have a Master, a

Guide, a Leader, under whose care and protection we shall find salvation, we shall find rest and a home at the last.

And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he was drawing near to Damascus, on the 5th or 6th day perhaps of his journey, *and suddenly there shone around him a light out of the heaven.*

In one of his own later narratives of the event he says that it was *at mid-day* that this light gleamed upon him; and that it was distinguishable even from the blaze of an Eastern noon; it was *above the brightness of the sun.* His attention was to be arrested, and the Creator of light and of the sun knew how to do this effectually.

And he fell upon the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? We are told, in his own fuller narrative, that the voice spake to him *in the Hebrew tongue.* It was no mere fancy: the words were distinctly audible; they were the words of a known language; and they asked a question with reference to the errand on which he had come. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* He is known by name in heaven. His life is open there. His commission, his purpose in this journey, every secret of his heart, is read above; and he is asked *why* he thus persecutes Him who suffers with and suffers in every affliction of His people. How strange, how mysterious a question! A man whose whole life is given to treading out this spark of what he deems fatal error, this catching and spreading flame of a (to him) falsely so called Gospel, is asked from heaven what he is doing and why: what has this Person who speaks done that He should be thus hated, thus opposed, thus injured? May not the same question sound in some heart amongst us? What has Jesus Christ done that we should thus neglect, thus despise, thus sin against Him, personally, or in His little ones? Testify against Him this day, how has He injured thee? Has He not shed for thee His own blood? Why should it be that, *the more abundantly He loves, the less He is loved?*

And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee — so the common Version proceeds, though probably this clause is inserted from the fuller

narrative in the 26th chapter—*to kick against the goads.* He who often spake in parables below, speaks still in proverbs above. It is hard for thee, it is a folly and a cruelty to thyself, thus to kick against the goad that drives thee: it can but make the iron enter more deeply into thy flesh; it can but increase the pain of thy pursuit and of thy capture. What a Sermon might be preached on those words; on the sinner fighting against his God; refusing mercy, resisting grace, and bringing upon himself by his own perverseness a ruin which God would have averted.

Again a clause follows in our English Version, drawn, in substance, from the fuller narrative of the 22nd chapter, where, if life be spared, we shall meet it hereafter. The shorter text here stands thus, without interruption: *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: but rise and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* Space must be given for conviction to have its perfect work, before the new life could profitably begin, or the new trust be safely undertaken. We are always for precipitation: when a new idea presents itself, we rush, fit or unfit, to act upon it: but God is a God of patience: He proceeds calmly and therefore surely to His ends: *in due time* is written upon all His works, and therefore none has to be recalled or done again. *Enter into the city, and there, in due time, it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no one. In St Paul's own narratives of the event, in the 22nd and 26th chapters, he says, *When we were all fallen to the earth;* and again, *They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me.* These varieties, for contradictions they are not, prove one thing; that the descriptions of the sacred writers are free and independent: they have one great mark of truth upon them, that they are not studied and servile; they do not echo each other's words, they tell each its own story; there is none of that elaborate guarding and fencing of expressions, none of that careful reconciliation of statement with statement, which every court of justice regards with strong suspicion as a

sure indication of design and falsehood. Easy would it have been for St Luke, the writer of this history, to compare the 9th chapter with the 22nd and with the 26th, and to bring the three into a rigid verbal consistency. That he did not do so is a proof of his veracity, of his single-mindedness, of his confidence in the force of truth. We can all reconcile for ourselves: it is a waste of time to dwell upon the probable suppositions, that (1) they who first fell afterwards stood, or they who first stood (that is, stopped their journey) then fell terrified to the earth: or again, (2) that those who heard the sound of a voice did not hear the words spoken, and that those who saw the light yet saw no one, no person—the form of the Speaker was visible to Saul, and to him only. These are the mere easinesses of a popular narrative. The Word of God is not so unstable as to dread exposure from varieties which rather turn to it for a testimony.

And Saul arose (or *was raised*) *from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing:* 'blinded with excess of light,' he sought in vain to distinguish objects: *but leading him by the hand they brought him into Damascus. And he was for three days without sight, and ate not nor drank.*

Who can imagine the thoughts of remorse and anguish which filled his mind during those days of darkness? A whole lifetime must have been lived again: every opinion, every principle, every feeling, had to be reviewed and reversed: that which he had loved, now he hated; and that which had been highly esteemed was now becoming an abomination. Did not the figure of the dying Stephen now haunt his memory? What would he now have given for the counsel and comfort of him whom he had helped to murder? But it is vain to enlarge upon these topics: the silence of Scripture is more eloquent than man's words, and we can but ponder in our hearts that brief yet most expressive saying, *He was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

God sees, my brethren, what man is so slow to see, the value of a season of spiritual suffering, to those more especially whom He destines for a high place in His ministry and in His glory.

All the greatest lights of His Church in all ages have had such a kindling. Without this, it is scarcely possible for some colours of beauty and holiness to be burnt into the character. If any one here present is in trouble of this kind; walking in doubt and darkness, and seeing no light; I would counsel him already to give God thanks for it: whatever it be, however much or however justly you may blame yourself as the cause of it, yet, so far as it is suffering, *know you certainly that it is God's visitation:* bear it meekly, as the punishment of sin; bear it bravely, as the sign of discipline; and out of it, in His own time and way, God, if you look to Him and faint not, will surely, will infallibly work out good. Let us hear how it was with him whose wonderful conversion is before us.

Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus, by name Ananias. We know not how he came there; whether he was one of the converts of Pentecost, or one scattered on the persecution that arose about Stephen: this only we know, that he was placed there by God's Providence, *which ordereth all things both in heaven and earth,* to be ready for that blessed and honoured office now to be entrusted to him, as the Evangelist and the Baptist of the great Apostle St Paul. *And the Lord,* Jesus Christ Himself, *said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold,* it is *I, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight*—Christ knows the very names of our streets; yes, and the very house in which each one dwells—there is a sanctity therefore in human habitations, however humble, if the Lord vouchsafes to notice and to name them from heaven—*and seek, in the house of Judas*—how would it startle us to hear Christ name the master of one of our houses, and specify the penitent or the saint who dwells therein!—one *Saul by name, of Tarsus.* I know no verse in Holy Scripture more pregnant with solemn and comforting truths than this. There is still to be seen in that ancient city of Damascus, so travellers say, just such a street, perhaps the very street here spoken of; a long straight street, running from the gate at which Saul probably entered, till the eye loses it in the distance: and

here Jesus Christ names that street; names it from heaven; speaks of a particular house in it, just as insignificant, probably, as one of our own humble dwellings; calls the house by its master's name, and describes not only the name but the country of the stranger who was lying, blind and miserable, within its door. Surely He who thus spake then, and who is *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever*, has His eye and His ear still open towards us, marks our words and our deeds in the privacy of our dwellings, and could at any moment, if it so pleased Him, interpose in our lives with an authority which would constrain conviction. If He does not; if we, more than ever, are to *walk* now *by faith not by sight*, at least, God helping us, let us not walk with Him by neither, neither by faith nor by sight. O let us treasure that which we know of Him, and behave towards Him, in our daily conversation, according to that which we say of Him in our worship.

Seek out in the house of Judas—such is the command—one called Saul, of Tarsus; *for, behold, he prayeth, and saw a man, Ananias by name, come in, and place his hands upon him, that he might recover sight.* Thus to-day again, as before in the case of the Ethiopian convert, we mark the double preparation for the communication and for the reception of truth. Saul sees in a vision the man who is to minister to him; and the messenger is shown in a vision the work to which he is called. But there is an obstacle to be overcome.

But Ananias answered, Lord, I heard from many persons about this man, how many evils he did in Jerusalem to Thy saints: and here he hath authority—he has a commission to this city—*from the chief priests, to bind all that call on Thy name.* A Christian is briefly characterized as *one who calls on*, who invokes, who calls in to his aid, *the name of Christ;* that is, Christ in His revealed character, as the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners. Will that, my friends, describe our life? that it is a constant calling in of Jesus Christ to our help, and to our guidance, and to our protection, and to our consolation?

But the Lord said to him, Go; for this man is to me a vessel of

selection, a chosen implement, *for the purpose of bearing my name*, of carrying the revelation of me, *in the presence of both Gentiles and kings, and sons of Israel;* in the presence, that is, of both classes of mankind, Gentiles with their rulers, as well as Israelites: *for I will indicate to him*, I will give him as it were a hint or glimpse of what is before him, enough at least to make him understand the nature of his mission, *how many things he must suffer in behalf of my name*, of me as revealed for the life and healing of the nations.

And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and after placing upon him his hands, said, Saul my *brother, the Lord hath sent me—Jesus, who appeared to thee in the way by which thou camest—that thou mightest recover sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell off from his eyes as it were scales, and he recovered his sight, and arose, and was baptized.*

It is now more than a century since an English nobleman, well known to fame both in politics and literature, published a work on the *Conversion and Apostleship of St Paul*, avowing himself to have been brought back from infidelity to Christianity by the study of that event which has occupied our thoughts this night. Did he exaggerate its importance as a proof of the Gospel? There is scarcely one man in all history of whom we have so intimate a knowledge as of this blessed Apostle whose 'wonderful conversion' is before us. We know what had been his education, what his prejudices were, what was the strength of his character, what the vehemence of his endeavours in the cause which he deemed to be that of truth and right. Was he a man likely to be influenced by a mere fancy, a chance dream, or (as some would persuade us) by a flash of lightning and a peal of thunder? Is that enough to account for so entire and so permanent a reversal of a man's whole career and aim of life? Must we not enquire what he himself said of an occurrence the consequences of which were so patent and so notorious? Again and again he refers to this event as an actual manifestation to him of the person of Jesus Christ. *Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?* is his question to those who would dispute his

Apostleship. *Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time*, is his last item in the catalogue of the appearances of the risen Jesus. In consequence of this belief, we see him addicting his life to the service of the Gospel which once he laboured to destroy. *We see him*, as it has been well said, *in the prosecution of this purpose, travelling from country to country, enduring every species of hardship, encountering every extremity of danger, assaulted by the populace, punished by the magistrates, scourged, beaten, stoned, left for dead; expecting, wherever he came, a renewal of the same treatment and the same dangers, yet, when driven from one city, preaching in the next; spending his whole time in the employment, sacrificing to it his pleasures, his ease, his safety; persisting in this course to old age, unaltered by the experience of perverseness, ingratitude, prejudice, desertion; unsubdued by anxiety, want, labour, persecutions; unwearied by long confinement, undismayed by the prospect of death. Such was St Paul....The question is, whether falsehood was ever attested by evidence like this. Falsehoods, we know, have found their way into reports, into tradition, into books; but is an example to be met with, of a man voluntarily undertaking a life of want and pain, of incessant fatigue, of continual peril; submitting to the loss of his home and country, to stripes and stoning, to tedious imprisonment, and the constant expectation of a violent death, for the sake of carrying about a story of what was false, and of what, if false, he must have known to be so?*

For the present, we must be contented to have just seen the commencement of this life of self-devotion. We have seen what it was which started St Paul on this new career; what it was which turned him round from one direction to its very opposite; what it was which made him who entered Damascus to persecute stay there to preach. I believe it to be far more irrational to doubt his account of it than to receive it. I believe that Jesus Christ Himself did present Himself to the eye of Saul of Tarsus, as He exists now in Heaven, as *He showed Himself alive* to His disciples *after His passion by many infallible proofs*; that He spoke to him from heaven; that He promised him

direction and guidance as to his future life; that He sent him that first instruction by the message of Ananias; that He communicated with him ever after, and from time to time more particularly, by the living agency of the Holy Ghost the Comforter; that He took him into His service, stood by him in danger, supported him in depression, gave him courage for his testimony, and (in every sense of the words) *made His own strength perfect in his weakness.* And if this be so; if there be nothing contrary to right reason in accepting these facts as true; then I would say that it is irrational to doubt, and madness to trifle with, the revelation of the Gospel. If St Paul's conversion (with its circumstances) is a fact, then there is such a Person as Jesus Christ our Lord, once crucified for our sins, then raised for our justification, to be our Advocate, our Mediator, our Intercessor, our High Priest with God. *See*, if this be so, *that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.*

The three words of the text will tell us what must be the firstfruits of this new conviction. *Behold, he prayeth.* So spake the Lord to Ananias of him whom He was beginning to accredit as a chosen instrument. *Behold, he prayeth.* Had Saul of Tarsus never bent his knees in prayer before? Could he say, if this were so, that he had *lived in all good conscience before God* from his youth up? Had he never prayed seriously, earnestly, devoutly? Had he not prayed that morning when he went to the chief priests for his commission to persecute Christ's people? Had he not prayed during the days of his journey? on that memorable last day of his journey, when he drew near Damascus? Yes, my brethren: we do not read here any denial of it. But there were two or three points of difference between this and any prayer which he had before uttered.

First of all, it was the first prayer he had ever breathed with a knowledge of *the plague of his own heart.* It was the first time that he had seen himself as God saw him; as poor and destitute and miserable and blind; as a man needing a Sacrifice for his sins, a Mediator to intercede for him with God, and a Divine Spirit to make his heart His temple. It was the first time that

he had ever prayed as a penitent; as a man to whom all the past is but as a heap of worthless rags; as a man whose whole fabric of self-righteousness has toppled down, and who desires henceforth to be nothing, and to have nothing, and to do nothing, but from God and with God and in God. *I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* It was the first time —more than all else—that his prayer had ever made any mention, save in scorn and contempt, of that holy name in which alone a sinner can approach God. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ as necessary to salvation, as a Divine Person *whom truly to know is eternal life*, now first had place in his supplications. Doubtless with many bitter tears and many contrite confessions did he now bewail his past treatment of Jesus. Now his one cry was for that all-merciful Saviour to become his Propitiation and his Righteousness; the Guide of his way, and the Hope of his end. And therefore, if for no other reason, it could now be said of him, as never before, *Behold, he prayeth.*

How will our prayers bear these tests? Are they the prayers of the humble and the self-accusing? Are they the prayers of one *hungering and thirsting after* a *righteousness* not of man but of God? Are they the prayers of one who knows but of one only *name under heaven, given among men, whereby he can be saved?* Try yourself by these tests, and God give us no rest until by His grace it can at last be said of us, in these senses, in heaven above, *Behold, he prayeth.*

LECTURE II.

THE NEW CONVERT.

ACTS IX. 26, 27.

They were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles.

HISTORY is made up of epochs and eras. An epoch is a stop or pause in the sequence of events; a marked moment, at which the reckoning of time rests and begins anew. An era is the interval between two epochs; the period, longer or shorter, which intervenes between two of those marked moments, of those milestones of history, by which the memory assists itself in keeping count of time.

Common history has its epochs, and sacred history has its epochs. The life of nations has its epochs, and the life of individuals has its epochs. Sometimes an epoch of individual life is an epoch also of collective life, and a church or a nation dates by something which has happened to the life or the soul of a man.

In all good histories the epochs are strongly marked, and it is enough if the eras are more faintly indicated. Give the great turning-points of a life, its decisive impulses, its momentous changes, and we can almost fill it up for ourselves. Mark well the epochs, and the eras may mark themselves.

Thus it is in the best of all histories, those of the Bible. Last Sunday evening the events of three days fully occupied us:

to-night we can pass lightly over the events of three years. That was an epoch: this is the beginning of an era. The Conversion of St Paul is a pause and a signal memorable for all time: the years which follow, while he is a learner even more than a teacher in Christ's school, need but a briefer notice, though one full of instruction for us who ponder it thoughtfully.

Saul arose from his three days' fast and blindness, and received Baptism forthwith at the hands (we may suppose) of his Evangelist, the humble but faithful Ananias. His faith, however recent, was beyond question. He did believe—well might he believe—in the risen life of One who had spoken to him by his name from heaven. No exemption was either asked or given from the appointed mode of entrance into the Church of Christ. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved:* the call of Christ Himself did not supersede or modify those two conditions.

If there be any one here present, not yet baptized, let me pray him or her to lose no time in seeking that ordinance which even a converted Apostle did not disdain.

And having received food he was strengthened. And he became with, he joined the company of, *the disciples at Damascus during some days. And immediately in the synagogues he began to proclaim Jesus, that He is*, as being, *the Son of God.* First to the Jews; first in the synagogues, to which he had brought letters of authority to persecute; must he avow his new convictions. He had a recantation to make, as well as a testimony to bear. He had to say, and it must be said publicly, *This hand hath offended.* The natural character of St Paul aided this duty. He was a man of candour; a man of honest thoughts and frank words: and therefore he goes first to those with whom his new faith will gain for him no credit and no respect. Not satisfied with making new friends, he must also explain himself to old ones: it may be that in doing this, he will win at least a few souls to Christ.

And all who heard were amazed, and said, Is not this he who made havoc at Jerusalem of those who call on this name, the name of Jesus, *and had come hither for this purpose, that he might bring*

them, those who here call on this name, *bound to the chief priests? But Saul was more* (*increasingly*) *strengthened, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ;* showing, as we shall often hereafter find him, from their own Scriptures, that all the prophecies of *Him that should come* meet and have their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth.

And when many days were being fulfilled, were in course of completion, *the Jews took counsel to kill him. But their plot was made known to Saul. And they watched also the gates of the city, both by day and night, that they might kill him. But the disciples took him, and by night through the wall*, through the window, perhaps, of a house built into or overhanging the city wall, *they let him down, by lowering him in a basket.*

And on his arrival in Jerusalem, he endeavoured to join himself to the disciples; and they all feared him, as not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him, took him (as we say) by the hand, came to his aid, *and brought him to the Apostles; and related to them how on his journey he saw the Lord, and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he spoke boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord; and he spoke and disputed with the Hellenists*, the Greek-speaking Jews; *and they attempted to kill him. But the brethren, discovering it, brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.*

There still remain one or two points of some interest in connection with this brief narrative.

St Paul himself adds to it some particulars in the 1st chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians.

(1) He states that three years elapsed between his conversion and this first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian. The history in the Acts speaks only of *many days*. But so consistent is Holy Scripture with itself, even when it appears at first sight to involve a contradiction, that we are able to show distinctly from a passage in the Old Testament that the two forms of expression are in this instance perfectly consistent. In the 2nd chapter of the 1st Book of Kings, which contains the record of the beginning of the

reign of Solomon, we read that Shimei, being warned by the king not to quit the city on pain of death, *dwelt in Jerusalem many days:* and then the next verse opens thus; *And it came to pass at the end of three years.* The expression *many days* is large enough to cover a period of three years. So it is here. St Luke says it was *many days* before St Paul went to Jerusalem; and St Paul himself tells us in one of his Epistles that it was three years. The two forms of expression are perfectly harmonious. Observe, my brethren—for indeed in these days we ought not to omit the warning—how easy it is for rashness and ignorance to find inconsistencies in Holy Scripture, which a calmer enquiry will entirely explain and remove. Learn a greater reverence for God's Holy Word; and be assured that in divine things reverence is but another name for reason.

(2) In the same Epistle St Paul mentions a journey into Arabia, of which we have here no notice. Before he went up to Jerusalem, he *went*, he says, *into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.* During that three years' stay in Damascus he made a journey into Arabia. The region intended is differently understood: it may have been that Arabia which borders very closely upon Damascus itself. And the purpose of his journey is not mentioned; whether it was undertaken as a first missionary enterprise, or whether (as we would rather believe) it was designed to afford him a season of secluded meditation, greatly needed both for the review of the past, and for communion with his Lord in reference to the life now before him. St Luke leaves room, we have seen, for this journey, but does not mention it. His account of St Paul's life is full of omissions, except during that part of it in which he was himself with him. We are thankful for what he tells; and we are glad to supplement it from other sources; from the Epistles, that is to say, of St Paul himself.

(3) Once more, the same passage of St Paul's own writings tells us the length of his stay at Jerusalem on this occasion, and with which of the Apostles he then became acquainted. *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode*

with him fifteen days. But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God I lie not. Why this earnestness of expression? Because St Paul is vindicating in that passage the independence of his own Apostleship. He did not receive his Gospel at second hand: he was taught it by the Lord Himself. Doubtless, in the seclusion of his Arabian retirement, he was enlightened by direct communications of his Master's mind and will. It was three years before he saw one of the Apostles: when he at length visited Jerusalem, it was but for fifteen days, and during the whole of that visit he saw but Peter and James the Lord's brother. Thus were the words verified, *Paul, an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me was not after man. For even I received it not from a man, nor was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The twelve verses which form our text this evening must leave something behind them. God grant it.

1. We are told what St Paul's subject was from the first day of his ministry. *Straightway he preached* CHRIST *in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. We preach not ourselves*, he said some years afterwards, *but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. Christ our Subject;* that ought to be the motto of all preachers. St Paul never found it necessary to change his subject. It lasted him for his life. But what was it in his hands, on his lips? Was it the dry monotonous repetition of one doctrine—of the truth of the Atonement through the one Sacrifice? Was his preaching the perpetual harping upon one string, without variety and without life? Need I ask this question of any reader of his Epistles? Well may he speak there of *the unsearchable riches of Christ;* of *all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ bodily.* He found it so, evidently, to himself. He found in Christ an inexhaustible wealth of comfort, of sympathy, of help, of strength; an absolutely unlimited supply of grace in the present, and of hope for

the longest future. And this was what he sought to communicate. Like one of his fellow Apostles, he could say, *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.* That is true preaching; the endeavour to unfold and to divulge a reality first felt and prized within; the endeavour to call others in to share a happiness, or to join in a pursuit of happiness, felt to be the only restingplace of the life and of the soul of man. And can we not all say *this*—that we do want such a restingplace; and that we do believe it to be, could we but reach it, only in the knowledge and love of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? This was St Paul's subject when *he preached Christ.* May it be more and more—and O that it might be so for the same reason—our subject and your delight.

2. In its simple fact he could do this at once: he could *straightway preach Christ in the synagogues, that He was the Son of God.* He could tell, as a matter of plain proof, of direct evidence, that he, he himself, who had come out, on this occasion, to persecute and to destroy, had been arrested by a stronger hand as he approached the city, and constrained to confess that One whom he had scouted as a crucified and dead man was indeed living in the fulness of strength at the right hand of God in heaven. But we are not therefore to suppose that St Paul's knowledge was at once complete, or his spiritual life perfected. We read in the Gospel history, in a higher example still, the need of delay and of preparation before the exercise of a sacred calling. And we attach, in this respect, great value to that addition which St Paul himself makes to the narrative as here written; namely, his journey into Arabia, and the interval of three years between his conversion and his return to Jerusalem. Doubtless it was during this interval that he both learned and suffered many of those things of which he has left the record in his Epistles. Many of those *revelations of the Lord*, of which he there speaks as made personally to himself, were no doubt communicated then. And may it not have been, that that deep

experience of the conflict with indwelling sin, which he details so strikingly in the 7th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, was then especially gained? It is a great error, and one pregnant with mischief, to suppose that an Apostle, because he was specially called, and specially equipped for his high office, was therefore raised out of the ordinary experiences of the Christian life within; was exempted from the trials, and excused the struggles, which other men endure in rising from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. This notion deprives us of more than half of the comfort and benefit to be derived from their words and from their history. They are no longer men of flesh and blood, men of like passions with us, able to feel with us in our sorrows, and in the same degree to encourage us by their victory. And the same error runs on into a province in which it is not a mere loss of comfort, but a grave and sometimes fatal deception. Men talk as if conversion were the whole of a Christian life; as if a person, brought to see the guilt and the sin of his doings, and to seek forgiveness and cleansing in the blood of Christ, were thenceforth not only safe from condemnation but secure from sin; called not only to trust but to rest; not only to look to Christ for all, but even to dispense with that looking. We all know what has again and again come of this; in the sincere and honest-hearted, distress, disappointment, and perhaps despair; in the less scrupulous, carelessness, presumption, at last a hardened heart and a seared conscience. Conversion is a great thing; God's best gift to His sinful creatures: but let conversion itself be tried by these tests: first, is it the commencement of a change? and secondly, is it the commencement of a progress? A conversion which begins and ends with itself lacks every sign of that which Scripture so designates. A conversion trusted in as a security for salvation usurps the very place of the Saviour Himself, and becomes at once a delusion and a snare. A conversion which forgets and loses itself in Christ; which brings a man to the cross, and teaches him to abide there; which brings a man to the risen Saviour, and teaches him to draw from Him daily life and daily strength through the Holy Ghost; is a

blessing indeed above all price; a blessing for which there shall be everlasting thanks and praise in heaven.

3. How life-like are the lessons of Scripture! Which of us cannot understand that shrinking (of which the text tells) from the new convert, in the recollection of his former deeds? *He assayed to join himself to the disciples:* he felt himself, in heart and soul, one with them; he longed to exchange with them that sympathy which only Christians know, and which it is misery to them to be constrained to hide; he longed, too, to tell them his bitter self-reproaches for injuries once done to them, and to speak of that longsuffering love of Christ which had spared and sought out and reconciled even him, the blasphemer and the persecutor, yea (in his own judgment at least) the very chief of sinners. *But they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.* It was natural: the memory of their beloved Stephen at whose cruel death this man had assisted, and of many others, hunted down by his relentless rage against the Gospel, and compelled or at least tempted to blaspheme, could not but rise within them at the sight of him, and make it difficult to believe that the professed change was real. These things, in the retrospect, turn to the Gospel for a testimony: the thought of what Saul was only increases the miracle of what he is: such a change, so thorough, so astounding, is one of the standing evidences of Jesus and the Resurrection. But at the time it was hard to credit: *they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.* This was the punishment of long hostility to the truth and to the Saviour. Doubtless he bore it meekly: doubtless he confessed that it was his due. But ought not the record of that suspicion, of that coldness towards a holy and blessed saint, on the ground of what he once was, to make us all fearful of discouraging and daunting the nascent faith of others? Let me speak plainly; and let me speak especially to the young. Some of you are thrown together in large bodies; associated in trade or manufacture, where there is sometimes no eye over you to check the freest expression of thought and feeling: and you know that, in these days more especially, such freedom is sure to run on into

licence; you hear things said against Christ and against God's Word, which are deeply painful to the believing; and you have found by experience that argument on such subjects seldom succeeds in convincing, and more often tends to provoke to more ungodliness: you have learned therefore to keep silence; to preserve your opinion and your faith by meditation rather than by controversy: and amongst other securities against being shaken in your religion, you have adopted that of considerable isolation; you keep to yourselves, you avoid needless communication, you repel the advances of unbelieving or doubtful men. It is hard to blame you. You have a difficult and trying part to play: God help you to play it well and wisely. But remember one thing: there may be amongst you, though you know it not, men whose minds are more than half open to a better influence; men who through weakness only, not from deliberate choice of evil, are falling into a snare of the devil; men who, whatever they may say or not say in the company of the wicked, have yet a misgiving in their hearts as to the life they lead, and an openness to conviction as to the very truth with which they trifle. Take heed not to *quench the smoking flax* by your treatment of such a condition. Take heed not to be blind and not to be indifferent to the existence of such cases. If not yet disciples, these men are at least among those for whom Christ died: they have a claim therefore upon your assistance in turning to Him: and it would be a cruel selfishness if you allowed them to fall utterly from Him, from a fear lest perhaps they should hinder or distress you in your own faith and service.

4. Take then to your heart the example here presented of the conduct of the faithful Barnabas towards a still mistrusted disciple. We heard of him in an earlier chapter as receiving his name from the Apostles, in token, no doubt, of something in his character which suited the title of *a son of consolation*. How well does he here justify that appellation. We know not whether he was previously acquainted with him whom he here befriends. Saul was of Tarsus in Cilicia, and Barnabas of the not very distant island of Cyprus; so that there may have existed some such earlier

intimacy, as should explain the one acting (on two occasions in this history) as the helper and introducer of the other. But this we know, that Barnabas was a Christian man: he had drunk deeply of that Holy Spirit which is love, long-suffering, goodness, as well as peace and joy and gentleness. He knew the whole history of the new disciple: he knew how he had seen the Lord in the way, and how the Lord had spoken to him, and how Saul had at once avowed boldly the strength and certainty of his new convictions. And therefore he lost no time in mediating between him and those who doubted him. He brought him to the Apostles, and declared to them his history. Thus, like one of the original Apostles, St Andrew, he acted as the encourager and the helper of another in coming to Jesus. It is a blessed office, my brethren, this of the peacemaker; more especially when the peace made is not of earth only; when it affects the soul also, whether in its dealings with Christ Himself, or in its relations to Christ's servants. I could desire nothing better for one of those whose present difficulties I have been describing, than that he might be the means of clearing the path for another, weaker perhaps and less resolute than himself, towards Christ and towards heaven. *Look not every man*, in this sense, *on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

And is not this, my brethren, the very office of some of those who hear? What is the aim of a Visitor of the poor, in its highest aspect? Is it not this—to *bring to the Apostles*—in other words, to bring to Christ Himself—those who, but for such aid, might be lost sight of, might be left in disregard, in suspicion, in darkness? How often has the work of Christian charity been privileged to perform this highest office! How often has the ministry of the body gone on, under God's blessing, to be a ministry of the soul! Many a man has been first drawn to Jesus by finding himself cared for, in bodily things, by one on whom he felt himself to have no claim; by one whose service to him he saw to be wholly disinterested, wholly prompted by Christian love. God has knit together in a wonderful manner His various gifts of grace. He puts it into the heart of a Christian man or a

Christian woman to undertake this ministry to the poor. He leads others to give of their abundance, that the hand of the visitant may not be empty. He guides the steps to some poor man's home, where there is one who deems himself forsaken, and has begun to acquiesce in that neglect which is nevertheless paralyzing to the soul. In the surprise of this new solicitude, he begins to ask himself what is this motive which has wrought in a stranger's heart to do him this service. And he can assign no reason for it but this only; that there is a power in Christ's Gospel, which is mighty to overcome sloth and self, and to seek out, in the Saviour's name, those who were lost and sunk in sin. Then the heart is opened to attend to the things spoken, and the sleeping soul awakened from the fatal lethargy which bound it. This has been: God grant it may yet again be amongst us. A Christian care for the body may be made available to save the soul. It is thus that God's works are wrought below. It is thus that His grace penetrates into new homes, making men's hearts *willing in the day of His power*. In every such sowing, beloved brethren, expect the reaping; and pray, as you give, that the highest of all blessings may accompany your offering, guiding it not only to the healing of the body but to the saving of the soul.

LECTURE III.

QUIET TIMES.

Acts ix. 31.

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified: and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

The right use of quiet times is a great secret of Christian living. Human life is made up of alternations of storm and calm, of trouble and rest. It is so with individual life, and it is so with collective life; the life of a nation, or the life of a Church.

The earlier part of this chapter indicated a time of trouble for the Christian community. Persecution was hot against them: *even unto strange cities* they were followed by threats of violence. But now the chief persecutor has himself felt the force of truth; *a stronger than the strong man armed* has interposed, and he who was entering Damascus to make havoc of Christ's people is *now preaching the faith which once he destroyed.*

Other causes may have contributed to the change indicated in the text. It is said that the Roman Emperor Caligula, who in the year 38 succeeded Tiberius, was making an impious attempt to place his own image in the temple at Jerusalem; and that the attention of the Jewish authorities was wholly occupied with plans for frustrating his design. They had no time to persecute. Thus even *the fierceness of man* may *turn to God's praise,* and *the remainder of wrath* be *restrained* by His overruling hand.

The church then throughout the whole of Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified, gradually built up and strengthened; *and walking by the fear of the Lord,* as their rule and direction, *and by the encouragement of the Holy Spirit,* by His comforting and quickening influence, both in the hearts of the disciples and in the ministry of the Apostles, *was multiplied.* There were *added to the Church daily,* not in Jerusalem only, but through the length and breadth of the land, *such as should be saved.*

And the sacred history goes on to tell how particularly by the ministry of one man, the blessed Apostle St Peter, this enlargement of the Church in Palestine was effected. He made it his business to go hither and thither, *strengthening all the disciples.* Specimens of his ministry are given, in the two cases of Lydda and Joppa. In each of these a signal miracle attested the grace given to him. At Lydda there was a man, who had lain for eight years on a couch paralyzed, and who, at the authoritative word of Peter, *Jesus Christ healeth thee: arise, and make thy own bed,* arose straightway, and contributed largely, by the notoriety of his miraculous cure, to the spread of the Gospel, both in his own town, and in the adjacent plain of Sharon.

At Joppa there was a Christian woman, of eminent piety; her life one continued succession of charitable and beneficent deeds. *She was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.* With her own hands she ministered to the bodily wants of the poor. She busied herself in providing clothing for such as were in need. What a simple and instructive picture of the Christian women of all times. She lived in a place not larger probably at any time than many an English town: and there was nothing magnificent, in any sense, in her deeds of charity: but with God great and small are names unknown, and it has pleased Him to leave on record for all ages the history of this humble yet bright example. Let no Christian woman think for one moment that her charities are unnoticed or unregarded in heaven. If they spring out of genuine love, first to Christ and then to His people, they are all written there, though it is neither needful for others nor good

for themselves, that they be paraded in the book of the Church below.

At last the day of death arrived. *She fell sick, and died.* The usual offices were paid to the lifeless corpse; and then it was laid out in an upper chamber. But it pleased our Lord Jesus Christ to show Himself in this instance by the agency of another, as before on earth by His own, *the Lord of life and death.* The disciples at Joppa heard that a holy Apostle was within ten miles of them at Lydda; and whether from a desire for his comfort at a time of sorrow, or from a vague undefined hope that he might even remove the cause of that sorrow, they sent him an urgent message, *not to delay to come to them.* He obeyed the summons; not knowing (it may be) the precise work before him, but possessing that grace of which we have lately spoken, *the preparation* (*readiness*) *of the Gospel of peace*, and desiring to lose no opportunity of applying his Master's hand, whether in its consolation or in its strength.

He arrived in Joppa. And there a sad scene presented itself. There was the poor lifeless body, made ready for its burial; and the room in which it lay was thronged with mourning friends, all recounting what they had lost, and showing the practical proofs of piety in garments made for the poor by those busy industrious hands which are now (as they deem) for ever still in death. The Spirit of the Lord came upon the Apostle, and suggested to him a miracle above miracles; the restoration of this loved disciple to a longer life in the body. *He put them all out*, desiring, like his Master before him, an entire calm from distracting sights and sounds, that he might bring together every energy of his soul for that wrestling with God in prayer, which could alone give strength for a work so stupendous. Then *he knelt down, and prayed.* At last *he turned to the body*, and calling the departed person by name bade her (in one brief decisive word) *arise. She opened her eyes* once more upon the familiar scenes around, saw her restorer, and was by him *presented alive* to the little community which was bewailing her. Well can we understand that, when this *became known throughout Joppa, many believed on the*

Lord; and thus a large work, both of preaching and guiding, was opened before the Apostle, which constrained him to *abide many days in Joppa* in that humble dwelling from which he was to be called forth in God's Providence to a yet more significant use of the keys of the heavenly kingdom.

I have sought, my brethren, to lay before you in one view the inspired instruction here given, as to the use of a season of tranquillity such as that which lasts, for us, by God's blessing, all our life long, and which may still continue—we know not—as it has still continued from generation to generation. Whether indeed there will ever again be a period of actual persecution for the truth's sake, it is not given us to know. *The offence of the cross* has not *ceased,* within or without: it is in us all, as well as around us, still. But whatever contempt may be secretly entertained for those who truly believe and preach the Gospel, there is at all events no absolute persecution. What there is of persecution is within doors; from *foes of a man's own household,* reproved by his example and impatient of his scrupulosity. As a Church, as professors of the Gospel of Christ, we are in peace: no man oppresses and *no man forbids* us. Let us see then what we ought to be; what is the proper character and the proper work of a Church or a Congregation thus living in *quietness from fear of evil.*

The churches had peace: how did they use it? Did it make them indolent, unfruitful, unfaithful, inconsistent, quarrelsome?

Two things are said of them: first, they were *edified;* secondly, they were *multiplied.*

1. *Edified.* The figure is taken from the rise and progress of a building.

(1) The whole Church, of all lands and times, is a building; one building; planned by one Architect, carried on by one Builder, designed for one end, to be the eternal habitation of God Himself when at last (as a Prophet has written) *the headstone is brought forth with shoutings.* It is not easy to apprehend this unity. Only He who *sees the end from the beginning* can see the Universal Church as one. But the thought, however faintly

conceived, is full of comfort. It puts each one of us in his place; it shows us how small is the place of each one; and yet also it shows us that each one has his place, and that, if the place of any one be not filled, there is a chink, a fissure, a blank, be it ever so small, in the finished work. Is not that honour enough, and importance enough, for a creature and a sinner? Does it not say, loudly enough, and also persuasively enough, to each one of us, See that thy place in the universal temple be not a blank, or worse?

(2) Again, the Church of each land and of each age—let me say (for the time is short) the Church of each town in each generation—is a building. Yes, it may be but a fragment, but one corner, or one buttress, or one pinnacle, of the Universal Church; but you all know how any building, how this Church in which we are assembled, would look if one buttress fell or if one pinnacle were dislodged from it; and therefore you will not count it a small thing if some such humble position as that, or a position humbler still, be all that belongs to this our little community as it exists this year or this day in the sight of an all-seeing and all-regarding God. I say that this congregation of ours is a building: and is it then being *edified*, that is, built up? is it making any progress? is it rising, in solidity, in unity, in beauty? is it giving signs, more and more, of its destination as a habitation of God, as a place in which Christ Himself is to dwell and to walk, to be adored and beloved, throughout eternity? God grant it. We want more amongst us still of this collective feeling, of this sense of union and of unity, as a Church: if we would be *edified*, we must cherish it.

(3) And then, yet once more, each human soul, taken separately, is a building. *Your body*, St Paul says, addressing individual Christians, *is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God.* Each one of us is a building. How much we lose sight of this; living from day to day without one thought of the progress and of the unity of that personal being, which must be fit, when we die—if we would not be for ever miserable—to be God's abode, God's dwellingplace, God's

temple, through an eternal age. What a question is it, for each one, How is that building getting on, which is I myself? Are the foundations deeply and soundly laid, in the faith of Christ my Saviour? Is the superstructure rising day by day, gradually, regularly, quietly, yet consciously, perceptibly, visibly? In other words, Am I growing in grace? more and more prevailing over evil tempers, and sinful passions, and carnal lusts? better able to do as unto God the work which He has given me, and to overcome, in the strength of God, the temptations which assail me? Whose building is not either standing still, disfigured by unsightly materials, or actually unsound and rotten in its foundations? Times of tranquillity ought to be times of edifying: alas, too often they are times of suspended energy and of deep defilement.

2. Another thing is said of the congregations here described. They were edified: they were also *multiplied*.

A time of peace ought to be a time of outward as well as inward progress; a time of extension as well as a time of edification. It was so of old. *Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.* How is it now? How is it with the outskirts of the Church, with lands in which only Missions can operate? Is there zeal at home, in founding and in reinforcing such institutions? Is there a real interest in the reception of tidings from the Church's workmen abroad, as to the success of their labours? Alas, you know, my brethren, how impossible it is to gain even a hearing for such matters. You know, that, with much philanthropy, there is little Gospel zeal amongst us; that, where a thousand pounds can be gathered for a work of charity, it is hard to collect ten for a work of piety; hard to gain any response for a call to aid the Church's Missions, or to extend into new regions the knowledge of a Lord and Saviour. The Church is scarcely in this sense *multiplying*: new lands are not being evangelized; the Gospel net is scarcely spreading itself at all over the distant, the untracked waters.

And at home, how is it? Here, in this town, is the Church

at all *multiplying?* I trust so; but these results are not wrought without means, without honest and hearty efforts on the part of those whose own hearts are first won for Christ. Can we point, by tens, or by fives, or by units, to new persons brought to be worshippers, and brought to be communicants, by agencies now working amongst us? Let us pray for this, and let us labour too; not for our own glory, but for God's; not in our own strength, but in Christ's only; that individual victories may be won for Him on His enemy's soil, and that this sign of vitality may be largely vouchsafed to us, that the Church which is Christ's body is not being edified only, but multiplied.

We are not left in the dark as to how this may be done; what influences are mighty, through God, to this enlargement of His Son's fold. The Church multiplies, by its own progress in two things; *walking* (1) *in the fear of the Lord, and* (2) *in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.*

(1) *The fear of the Lord* is the fear of Christ. More than once we have been led to this topic. Our Lord Jesus Christ deserves not our love only, but our fear also. Does that seem strange to any one? Is He not our *merciful and faithful High Priest, ever living to make intercession for us?* Is He not described as *the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world?* Blessed be God, the words are His own; written for our comfort, and for our attraction towards Him. But they are not written to encourage us in evil. They are not written to make us careless about sin. They would not be God's words for us, if that were their effect. I suppose there is nothing which so solemnizes and so awes the mind of man, as the thought of an absolutely disinterested and an absolutely unbounded love. It says of itself, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* The greatness of the salvation is the measure of the danger.

To *trample under foot the Son of God, to count the blood of the covenant, wherewith we are sanctified, an unholy thing*, must indeed be of all crimes the blackest and the most fatal. And that is what men do every day for want of this very fear of

which the text speaks; the fear of the Lord, of Jesus Christ. Let us learn to regard Him as not only dying for sin but abhorring sin; hating it with a perfect hatred, as warring against that will of the Father which is man's deliverance and sanctification. My brethren, it is a dangerous thing when there is a prevalent laxity, in a congregation, or in a house, or in a soul, as to this fear of Christ; when all is resolved into that sort of love (falsely so called) which is mere easiness and weakness; when the whole of religion is resolved into feeling, and that feeling not one of reverent awe, but of presumptuous trust. To walk in the fear of Christ is one half of Christianity.

(2) And then, so walking, there is room also for the other characteristic; *and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.* These things are given in explanation of the churches multiplying; given, that is, in illustration of the effect produced upon by-standers and lookers on. To see a Christian fear Christ tends to multiply the Church. There is an awe about it, which is no repulsion. To see that a man lives every day in the remembrance of his Saviour; gives up what He forbids, loves what He commands, sets Him always before him, is jealous for His honour and personally seeks His glory; this, if in one sense alarming, is in another winning too; it is marvellously impressive, in a world like ours, so selfseeking and so godless, to see a man really living for another, to see a man really *looking not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal.* But if, in addition to this walking in the fear of Christ, there be also a visible walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost; if a man is not watchful only but happy too; if it is evident that he *has meat to eat which man knows not of*, and a spring of life within with which no stranger can intermeddle; it is scarcely possible that this should have no effect, under God, in multiplying His Churches: we may doubt whether any man ever so lived, without having been the means of adding to the Lord at least one soul that should be saved. *The comfort of the Holy Ghost* is not a mere soothing influence within; it is a cheering power without also. The same word is rendered by

comfort and by *exhortation.* The *son of consolation* is a *son* also *of exhortation.* The comforts of God are all powers too. God comforts by cheering on; by encouraging to action; by giving a new impulse to the life within, so that it shall spring forth to higher hopes, nobler efforts, and greater attainments. Therefore he who walks in the comfort of the Holy Ghost is evermore a partaker of that Spirit which is one *of power* as well as *of love and of a sound mind.* We may try the reality of our comfort, by this one test: does it stir me up and spur me on to action? does it make me vigorous as well as peaceful? does it say, in the depths of my soul, not, *Rest from work,* but, *Rest in working?* If the latter, it is, we may humbly hope, of the nature of that comfort in which when the Churches walked, they were multiplied as well as edified.

3. Finally, we shall regard a time of outward tranquillity as one peculiarly favourable to the exercise of Christ's ministry. And when I speak of Christ's ministry, I desire to include in that description not only an official but a personal service; quite as much the ministry of her whose humble leisure was filled with almsdeeds for Christ's poor, as of him who *passed through all quarters* ready to heal the sick or to reanimate the dead. How ungrateful is it if, because God casts our lot in quiet times, we are to enjoy a selfish and thankless ease, doing nothing for Him and nothing for our brethren; nothing to spread the knowledge of Christ, or to draw others, at our own doors, in our own homes, to follow Him. What are we doing—let each one ask himself, let each one ask herself, What am I doing—to show my thankfulness for the blessings and the hopes of a Christian? And if any heart be aroused by these reflections to a sense of idleness and of ingratitude, remember that he must be a drowsy and negligent shepherd who cannot find you work to do, much or little, for his Master's sheep that are (all around us) scattered abroad, and that no comfort could be greater to those who here *watch for your souls,* however imperfectly, *as they that must give account,* than to see one and another coming to them for work to be done for Christ; nor any hope more certain, than that the desire

for Christian work will be always twice blessed, blessed as much to those who do it as to those in whose behalf and in whose service it is done.

What am I doing, such is the question, to show my thankfulness for the blessings and hopes of a Christian? If nothing else, am I at least caring for the poor? There are those who feel themselves unequal to any other, any more directly spiritual source. Then let them begin with this. Let them, in the privacy of home, work, like this Christian woman, for Christ's poor. Instead of saying, all through life, to the needy, *Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled*, let them see what little can be done, in their own kitchen or by their own hand's toil, to procure, for a few at least, *those things which are needful for the body.* And let them consecrate every such offering by humble self-abasing prayers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let their own hope and faith rest firmly on Him. So when they come to die, if not mourned, like her of whom we have read to-night, by the tears of many who have here lived by their bounty, at least they may have Him with them whose love can illuminate even death and the grave, and whose voice shall at last be heard in the darkness and stillness of each separate sepulchre, saying, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead:* yea, *come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

Grant this, we beseech Thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer.

LECTURE IV.

THE FIRST GENTILE CHRISTIAN.

Acts x. 15.

What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

The history which comes before us to-night may be regarded as the prelude to the ministry of St Paul. He was to be the Apostle to the Gentiles; and the conversion of the first Gentile is our subject this evening. St Paul was not the agent in that conversion. He was still at Tarsus, his native place, making preparation for that life of labour in Christ's service which will soon occupy our chief attention in the study of this Book. God works as He will, and by whom He will: Paul or Cephas, Paul or Apollos, it matters not: all have one end, each has his own work, and God alone gives the increase. It was well, too, that Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision, should be thus early committed to the evangelization of the Gentiles. There must be no schism in the body: it must not be said, even falsely, that Paul and Peter had different opinions on the question whether in Christ Jesus there shall be henceforth circumcision or uncircumcision, one God of the Jews and another of the Gentiles. Truth is one; and the Apostles of the truth must be one also.

We read in the Gospels of a centurion whose faith put to shame that of the children of the kingdom. The first Gentile convert was in like manner a centurion; an officer in the Roman army; resident at Cæsarea, the head-quarters of the Roman government in Palestine. A soldier may be a good man. Some

of God's most eminent servants have been officers in the army. The centurion in the Gospel drew an argument for faith in Christ from his own experience of discipline. If I, a mere man, can say to a soldier under me, *Go*, or *Come*, or *Do this or that*, and be sure of his obedience; how much more can this Person, in whom God is, say to a fever or a palsy, *Depart*, or, *Be healed*, at His pleasure. It was a just argument. The habit of subordination, and the habit of command, acquired in military service, has often been an aid, under God's blessing, to the regulation of the life without, and to the disciplining of the soul within. It was to a man in this position and of this character, that it pleased God to send, first of the Gentiles, the gift of eternal life.

The description of his character is remarkable.

(1) He was already *a devout man, and one that feared God.* He was acquainted with the true God: he was no idolater: he had learned, perhaps from his residence in Judea, to fear and to worship one God only, his Maker and Preserver and Benefactor. In this sense he was a proselyte; a proselyte of the gate, as it was called, though not admitted by circumcision into a closer connection with Israel, or into the higher position of what was termed a proselyte of righteousness.

(2) His influence was all for good. *He feared God, with all his house.* He took care to regulate his household well, and to instruct them in his own religion. He did not, as is too common even among professed Christians, wrap himself up in selfish security, and take no concern for the safety of those around and beneath him. His religion was a family as well as personal religion. *He feared God with all his house.* And therefore, when he wanted a fit messenger on a religious errand, he had no difficulty in finding *a devout soldier* among *them that waited on him continually.* It is a great blessing, and it might be a common blessing, to have a pious as well as faithful servant, to whom even the affairs of the soul might on occasion be no secret.

(3) And it was not only within doors that his influence wrought. His charity, like his piety, began at home, but it did

not end there. He *gave much alms to the people.* Though he seems to have been among strangers, only quartered in Cæsarea on military duty, yet he did not make that circumstance an excuse for disregarding the wants that surrounded him. He cared for the poor. He not only sanctified his own comforts by thanksgiving, but also acted upon the principle laid down by Him whom as yet he knew not, *But rather give alms of such things as ye have, and behold, all things are clean unto you.*

(4) In the last place, the secret of his life is disclosed to us; how it was that he was thus reverent, and thus exemplary, and thus charitable. He *besought God always.* He was continually praying. Praying, doubtless, for more light; praying also for grace to act faithfully according to the light he had. And therefore to him the promise was soon to be fulfilled, *To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.*

On one of these occasions of prayer, during the ninth hour of the day, three o'clock in the afternoon, he was surprised by the visit of an Angel, calling him by his name, and telling him that *his prayers and his alms had gone up,* like the sweet savour of a sacrifice, *for a memorial before God.* It is a remarkable and a beautiful expression. The prayers and the alms of Cornelius had a record, as it were, in heaven. It is like the saying of the prophet Malachi, *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.* The prayers and the alms of the humble and waiting soul are entered in the book of remembrance which is written in heaven.

And entered there not as an idle or a boastful record, but as a plea for more light and clearer guidance. The direction sent to Cornelius, as the reward (we may truly say) of his consistency and devotion, is, that he send to Joppa to summon to him a new teacher, who shall tell him what he ought to do; *tell him words* as we read afterwards, *whereby he and all his house shall be saved.* God's *comforts* are all *encouragements* too; not a mere soothing or satisfying, but rather a wakening up and an urging on. So it

was here. God rewards by improving; shows His love by adding light.

Cornelius lost no time in acting upon this direction. Like Saul of Tarsus, he *was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.* As soon as the Angel departed, *he called two of his household servants*, and that *devout soldier* of whom we have already spoken, made them acquainted with the cause, and sent them off to Joppa; a journey of about five and thirty miles.

But we have often had occasion to notice how God, designing to send one of His servants on a special mission, first prepares and instructs his mind for a work to which otherwise he might have felt repugnance. It was so with Philip and the Ethiopian: it was so with Ananias and Saul: it is so again with Peter and Cornelius. Peter was a man full of prepossessions and prejudices on the subject of religious differences. *The middle wall of partition* between Jew and Gentile was for him an impassable barrier: he could not imagine a Gentile being brought into God's Church otherwise than through the sacrament of circumcision. Nothing less than a direct intimation of the will of God could suffice to make him obey the call of one who was no Israelite. We may blame him; we may call it bigoted and narrow-minded; but perhaps before we close the book this evening we may have seen that, without his excuse, we are all too ready to imitate his example.

The God whom we serve is a considerate as well as a compassionate God. He takes thought for His servants. He does not suffer them to be surprised into disobedience. If He is about to send them an unexpected and an improbable commission, He sends them first a notice of it and a key to its meaning. Thus it was here. The men sent by Cornelius were approaching the end of their journey, about noon on the day following that of his vision, when Peter went up to the housetop for a season of seclusion and prayer. There he was, alone upon the flat Eastern roof, looking only upon sea and sky, his mind filled with those holy and magnificent thoughts which are so congenial to the contemplation of those two grandest features of nature. As time

went on, he became conscious of hunger; and while food was preparing for him, *he fell into a trance.* In his trance he saw a vision. From the open sky there came down the appearance of a great sheet-like vessel, let down by its four corners till it rested upon the earth. As he gazed upon its contents, he saw all manner of beasts and birds and creeping things, herded indiscriminately within it. At the same moment a voice came to him, bidding him, in his hunger, to *kill and eat.* The Apostle remonstrated against such a breach of the Levitical Law. *Not so, Lord,* he pleaded: lay not upon my conscience such a burden: *for I never* so transgressed the Mosaic statutes as to *eat anything common (defiled) or unclean.* But the voice replied, *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* Three times this strange scene was repeated; the same command, the same remonstrance, and the same reply; and then all disappeared, and Peter was left to muse alone upon the purport of the vision. While he was thus engaged, the Holy Spirit announced to him that it was but the prelude to a call of duty. Three men were already seeking him; he must arise, and go down, and set out with them on a journey, assured that He, the Spirit of God, had sent them.

It was even so. He found at the gate the messengers of Cornelius, and on hearing from them a brief account of their errand—how Cornelius a centurion, a just and God-fearing man, bearing a high character among his Jewish neighbours, had been warned of God by a holy Angel to send for him to his house and to hear words from him—he at once invited them in, entertained them for the night, and on the morrow started with them for Cæsarea.

The history is full of lessons for us: some of them we have already indicated.

1. There is the duty of one who is as it were *watching for the morning;* waiting for a clearness of faith and hope which as yet he has not. *Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by it:* and whatsoever we lack, whether of knowledge or of comfort, *God,* in His own good time, *shall reveal even this unto us. In the way of Thy judgments*

have we waited for Thee. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine. Cornelius used his light, and prayed for more. Cornelius was already just, already reverent, already a worshipper with his house, already liberal and charitable, above all, he was already earnest and constant in prayer, before he knew anything of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. What, my brethren, are we who know? Which of his characteristics does not condemn us? *Prophets and righteous men* of old *desired to see the things which we see:* we see them, and heed them not. Which of us carries his household with him in his fear of God? Which of us *disperses abroad and gives to the poor?* Which of us—for that is the test of tests—prays to God always? Alas, while we are as we are, the light that is around cannot shine within, and the eye that should see it is gradually losing its power.

2. But, while the example of Cornelius thus condemns, let us not lose the recollection that he still needed a conversion. How can men read this history, and talk of it as the record of the first Gentile conversion, and yet go their way to think a Gospel faith needless? Which of them would not count a Cornelius of this day safe for heaven? Which of them would not consider that a just man, and a godly man, and a charitable man, and a devout man, was all, perhaps more than all, that can be required for salvation? It is becoming the fashion now to claim what is called a wide latitude for opinion and doctrine, and to say that, if a man only walks according to the light he has—or rather, if a man only lives morally and does his duty—we need not trouble ourselves about his faith: *he can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.* We must indeed think the conversion of Cornelius a strange misnomer; we must indeed regard the whole record—the visit of the Angel, the mission to Peter, the vision from the housetop, and the double journey—a mere waste of strength and trouble, needless for its object and unworthy of God; if we do not simply believe that *there is salvation in none other* than Christ; *that there is none other name under heaven, given among men,* save His alone, *whereby we must*

be saved. Not for the sake of judging others, but certainly for our own warning and quickening in the life of God, do we need, all of us, to remember that he whose conversion is before us was no scoffer, no profane person, no libertine, no profligate, but one who already *feared God with all his house, gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.* Do I address any to-night —alas, *it must needs be*—who are practically resting for their salvation upon a moral or at least a decent life? men of middle age perhaps, immersed in life's toils and cares; or men past middle age, sinking into the dulled perceptions and blunted enjoyments of the old; but who, in either case, have no real hold upon the revelations of the Gospel, no lively sense of their need of a Saviour's blood, no true habitual communion with God their Father through the Holy Spirit? My brethren—I would say, with all earnestness and with all tenderness also, to such men—think of God sending a holy Apostle to the blameless and exemplary Cornelius, to tell him words whereby he and all his house might be saved. Does not this of itself teach you, that a man's soul, even a blameless man's soul, needs saving, saving from sin and death, and saving in Christ only? Whatever you are, you can scarcely be a better man than Cornelius: and yet he needed Christ, and the knowledge of Christ, and the possession of Christ's Spirit, to save his soul. The same word which was miraculously sent to him is yours all the time: this Book of God contains it: O study it! neglect it not all your life long; but so apply yourself to it, with the simplicity and the earnestness which God loves, that, before you die, you may see its glorious light, and be guided by it into the haven where you would be.

3. Thus the example of Cornelius on the one hand, and the conversion of Cornelius on the other hand, may admonish us according to our need. And shall we not learn something also from the Apostle's vision, by which he was made *willing in the day of Christ's power*, to *open the door of faith to the Gentiles? What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

(1) The words were spoken, first of all, of *persons.* Those Gentiles, who are as much God's creatures and God's children as

are the natural seed of Abraham; those Gentiles, whom it is His pleasure now at once to receive into equality of position and equality of acceptance with the Jews, on the ground of the same faith in Christ Jesus which alone can enable a sinner of any race to draw near to God; think not of these, and speak not of these, and act not towards these, as though they were excluded from thy sympathy by a mere difference of blood and lineage. Be ready for that call which is now instant, to go to a Gentile home as its first Apostle and Evangelist. Such was the meaning of the text, as it first fell upon the ear of St Peter in his vision on the housetop.

But what does it say to us? We are in no danger of needing its first lesson. We ourselves are Gentiles, and know that our one hope lies in the abolition of Mosaic ordinances, and the admission of all nations of men into the fold and Church of Christ. And yet we are for ever making to ourselves new distinctions, less excusable and far more arbitrary, on the ground of which we refuse to other men our sympathy and our charity.

Such, for example, are those differences of opinion and observance which divide the Christian Church itself into parties within and sects without. How slow are we to give the right hand of fellowship to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. How apt are we to scrutinize the precise forms of words in which others express themselves, and to judge harshly and speak uncharitably of any who do not frame their ideas of truth exactly on our model. May we not apply to such cases the warning voice of this vision, *What God hath cleansed*, by His own forgiving act, and by His own indwelling Spirit, *that call not thou common?* Frame not new conditions of Christian unity, beyond faith in the same Saviour and the visible fruits of the same Spirit. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God.*

But we might almost wish that our divisions sprang only or chiefly out of differences of doctrine. At least it would show that we were interested and anxious about the things of God, however mistaken in our use of them. Alas, I fear it is more often from other causes that we disapprove and despise our brethren. How prone are we to make our own little circle, and then disparage all who are out of it. How ready to say, Such a person is beneath my notice; too low in birth or too humble in station to be fit company for me and mine. And thus even amongst those who are dwelling side by side in the same street of the same little town, and whom a stranger might imagine to be not far at least from an equality of position, there will be found parties within parties and distinctions within distinctions, severing them altogether from anything like unity, and splitting up the body of Christ, even in its smallest portions, into shreds and fragments as minute as they are arbitrary. Well may it be said to such creators of differences, *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* Be broad and generous in your sympathies, and love not to exclude but to combine.

And thus it is yet more visibly, when we reach the thought of the more destitute members of Christ's body. In what a contemptuous spirit do many deal with the poor. How slow are they to remember the Apostle's question, *Who maketh thee to differ? what hast thou which thou didst not receive?* How commonly do we think and judge of the poor, as though there were something wrong in being in need; as though the presence of poverty, apart from any question as to its cause, were not painful only but almost contaminating; as though it did away with the nominal unity of all human beings in a common Father and Redeemer and Sanctifier, and justified a tone and a manner altogether disparaging and contemptuous. *My brethren, these things ought not so to be. What God hath cleansed,* what He has not thought beneath the notice of His Providence and of His salvation, ought not surely to be below the regard of those who owe everything themselves to His bounty: *what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* We are all one, in the

aspect of His creation and of His redemption: let us be one also in the aspect of our own sympathy, our own charity, and our own love.

(2) Finally, the words of the text have an application, just and true, not to persons only, but to *things*.

There is in all of us a strong tendency to disparage the sacredness of earthly life. We are apt to call it common. Some have done so in a religious but a morbid spirit. The light of eternity, presented perhaps in the midst of a career of thoughtlessness or sin, has dazzled the eye which was unused to it. The question, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* has been answered to their ear, not as Christ would have answered it; not by bidding them do for Him what before they had done for themselves; not by bidding them, *in the calling wherein they were called, therein* henceforth to *abide with God;* but rather by a call to *go out of the world*, to frame for themselves a new set of duties and of interests, and to run away from temptations which ought rather to be met and conquered. What God has cleansed, His servants have sometimes called common. They could not understand how God has provided for each one of us a sacred calling in a common one; how *the trivial round, the common task*, may be so elevated and so sanctified by an all-pervading and all-constraining love of Christ, as to become that very circle of *good works, which God has before prepared that we should walk in it.*

Others, again, and more, we fear, in number, have called the occupations of life common, and in calling have made them so. It is easy enough to keep God out of our earthly life; far, far easier than to bring Him into it. God has cleansed it. He has given, and He has sanctioned, and He has blessed, and He has sanctified, all the relations of life and all its duties and all its offices, its work and its relaxations, its intercourse and its companionships, to be a daily offering, of innocence, of thankfulness, of happiness, of usefulness, to His honour no less than to our good. It is not of Him that it is common. But any one of us can make it so. We have only to follow inclination, we have

only to let ourselves alone, we have only to make no effort and use no means; and life will be common, every part of it, for us, even though in itself, and as God gave it, and as some actually find it, it is indeed *none other than the house of God*, none other than the very *gate of heaven.*

This then is our struggle: how, without going out of the world, we may be kept in it from the evil. And this is the very happiness of knowing Christ. He who has passed through all, and has died to sanctify all, can both feel with our infirmities, and also raise us out of them. Miss not, Christian brethren, through neglect, procrastination, or sin, the attainment of this great salvation. *Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found. The night cometh:* then let the day be well used. *The night cometh:* then let it not find you among those who, so far as the soul is concerned, have *stood all the day idle. The night cometh:* then let it be to you a night of rest after toil, and not of gloom or confusion, not of fatal surprise, and not of outer darkness. *Seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.*

LECTURE V.

THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES.

Acts x. 33.

Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

Would that this might be the spirit of us also, my brethren, who are here assembled this night. Would that we might all regard ourselves as gathered together to receive a message; a message from God, and a message to the soul.

We have heard already of that twofold preparation which God made for the first preaching of the Gospel to a Gentile; how he was prepared to receive, and how an Apostle was prepared to communicate, under these new circumstances, the word of eternal life. To-night we are to read how and in what form the communication itself was made, by which *the middle wall of partition* was effectually *broken down*, and the whole world entered upon an inheritance hitherto confined and restricted to a single nation.

The hasty and impetuous Peter had now become, under the influence of transforming grace, a considerate and a self-governed man. He allowed a night to intervene before he set out on his new commission. Doubtless it was a night of much communing with himself, and of much prayer to God also. Since the great day of Pentecost, seven or eight years before, he had known no crisis so momentous. That flinging back of the golden gates of the kingdom, by the application of the Apostolical key, to admit men of every race and tongue and creed, on the simple condition

of faith within and of baptism without, was an event, difficult indeed for us to marvel at, but for him, educated as he had been, and prepossessed as he had been, nothing less than a revolution in the eternal counsels of God. But Peter, though he had lost his impetuosity and was fast losing his prejudices, had not lost his vigour for action, nor his readiness to give effect to conviction. After one night of calm reflection, diligent search, and earnest prayer, he was ready to set forth on his errand; accompanied, not only by the three messengers of Cornelius, but also, in consideration no doubt of the gravity and interest of the occasion, by certain members of the infant Church of Joppa.

The journey safely accomplished, by the afternoon of the second day, Peter is received at the house of Cornelius by an expectant company of the kinsmen and near friends of its master. At the door, Cornelius meets him, with an act of homage to the exalted character of his visitor, which was already familiar to a Roman in the case of his Emperor, but which the Apostle, mindful of his Master's solemn charge, refused as an act of superstition and idolatry. *Stand up: I myself also am a man.* The minister of Christ, even if he be an Apostle, is still but a man: in that identity of nature with his people lies as much his strength as his weakness. Compassed, like them, with every infirmity, he can both feel for the sins and the weaknesses of others, and also *comfort them in all their tribulation with the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God.*

He entered the house talking with him, and at once addressed himself to the company whom he there found assembled. First of all, he reminds them of the deep-rooted principle from which he is departing, in coming to them at all. A Jew could only associate with those whom first he has brought over not only to his own religion as a matter of opinion and doctrine, but also to his own religion as a matter of ritual and ceremonial. But *God has showed him that he should not call any man*, any human being, *common or unclean.* It needed God's own teaching, the teaching of a divine vision and a divine voice, to write upon his heart this (to us) elementary lesson; that every human being is in the sight

of God of equal value; that He looks not upon the nominal creed or the religious enlightenment, any more than He looks upon the rank or the wealth or the colour, as giving or withholding a share in the universal sonship and the universal brotherhood of man. Let us, who have learned the lesson, or who scarcely needed to learn it, see that we also remember, and that we also practise it.

Now therefore, having come to them without gainsaying, as soon as he was sent for, he must know for what intent they have sent for him. Cornelius answers by recounting the story of his vision. Four days ago he was keeping the ninth hour in prayer in his house, when suddenly *there stood before him a man*—that is, one in the form of a man, but described before as *an Angel of God—in bright apparel.* In words few but most encouraging, this messenger of God assured him of the acceptance of his prayers, and of the remembrance before God of that self-denying bounty to the poor by which he attested the sincerity of his devotion. To him who thus had, more should now be given. *Send therefore*, it was said to him, *to Joppa, and call hither* a man named *Simon, whose surname is Peter:* he is lodging there, in a particular house—of which the owner and his trade are expressly mentioned—by the sea-side. Send for him, and listen to him. *Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of the Lord.*

Ten verses comprise the whole of St Peter's answer; the whole of that revelation which was to be the eternal life of Cornelius and his house. *Not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but by demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, was the first Gentile conversion wrought, and the gate of the heavenly kingdom set wide open to mankind.

Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. God looks not on the race or the profession or the outward ritual: He does

not accept a man for being a Jew, or reject a man for being a Gentile. That is what St Peter says. He does not say, as some would pervert his words, that it matters not what a man believes, provided his life is moral, and his conduct consistent with his knowledge and his principles. The brief answer to such a construction of his words is found in the fact of his being there to utter them. If Cornelius was safe in his prayers and his almsgivings, why was St Peter sent to tell him words whereby he and all his house might be saved? The stress lies on the words *in every nation*. No longer amongst the Jews only, but in every tribe and race of man, those who are willing to know God's will, those who are sincere and candid and conscientious, are called and are chosen and are fitted to *receive health and salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Light is come into the world: and he that doeth truth cometh to that light*, that he may walk in it and be saved. *He that is of God heareth God's words:* he that feareth God and (according to his power) worketh righteousness is accepted with Him as a hearer of Christ's Gospel, and an inheritor, whether Jew or Gentile, of every hope and every blessing of the faithful. *In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature...but faith which worketh by love.*

Now therefore St Peter can boldly speak to this Gentile the word of eternal life.

The word (or *communication*) *which He sent unto the children of Israel, preaching* (*proclaiming the glad tidings of*) *peace by means of Jesus Christ;* peace with God, after estrangement and enmity, through Jesus Christ: *He is Lord of all;* not of Jews only, but of the whole race of men; *Lord*, as St Paul expresses it, *both of the dead and living: ye know*, I say, *the word:* or rather *the thing;* just as in the Gospel of St Luke the shepherds say one to another, *Let us go now even unto Bethlehem, and see this word* (*thing*) *which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us:* it is so here: *ye know the thing*, the fact, the event, *which came to pass throughout all Judea, having begun from*

Galilee after the baptism which John proclaimed; even Jesus of (*from*) *Nazareth, how God anointed Him,* made Him the Christ or Messiah—it is the same word—*with the Holy Ghost and with power.* The sentence is often broken. It all depends on the words, *Ye know.* First we have, *Ye know the communication which God sent.* Then, *Ye know the thing which took place throughout Judea.* Then, *Ye know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him.* The *word* (*communication*) of the 36th verse, and the *word* (*fact*) of the 37th verse, are said in the 38th verse to be identical with the person of *Jesus of Nazareth.* He is the word, He is the fact, which constitutes the Gospel.

And now read the brief account of His life and of His work.

Who went about doing good. Benefiting is the exact expression. His whole ministry was that of a Benefactor. *And healing all that were oppressed* (*tyrannized over*) *by the devil: for God was with Him.* The devil is man's tyrant: he uses them as mere subjects and creatures, and treats them with all the insolence of a despot. That is one remark upon the words. Do not count yourself free until Christ has made you so: till then you are a slave, under the despotism and tyranny of one who is stronger than you, though there be One and but One who is stronger even than he. And again, this bondage to the devil is a state of disease: Christ *heals* those who are oppressed of the devil: it is health to be a Christian; and it is disease to be the slave of sin.

And we are witnesses of all things that He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. We can tell you of these things, because we ourselves saw them. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.* It is a matter of fact, of which we are eye-witnesses.

Whom also they slew by hanging on a tree, on the malefactor's cross. *Him God raised* from death *on the third day, and showed Him openly* (*gave Him to become manifest*); *not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from among the dead: and He charged us to proclaim to the people and to asseverate* (literally, *to*

protest, or *assert with strong protestation and appeal*) *that it is He who has been ordained* (*marked out*) *by God to be the Judge of quick and dead;* of those who shall be alive, and of those who shall be already dead when He comes again in His glory.

To Him all the prophets bear witness, that every one who believes on Him receives (as a single act) *remission* (*dismissal*) *of sins through His name.*

While Peter was still speaking these words, there fell the Holy Ghost upon all who were hearing the word (*communication*). *And all the believing Jews who came with Peter were astonished, for that even upon the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Ghost is* (*hath been*) *poured forth: for they heard them speaking with tongues*, in various dialects and languages, *and magnifying God. Then answered Peter*, said in reply to their expressions of amazement, *Can any one hinder the water* of holy Baptism, *so that these men should not be baptized? persons who received the Holy Ghost even as also we?* we who on the day of Pentecost were made partakers of that marvellous gift? *And he ordered that they should be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay on for some days.*

1. Such, my brethren, was the Gospel, in the days and on the lips of the Apostles. It was a record of facts; and out of the facts grew the doctrines. It was not a mere lesson of morality. It did not say, Do your best, and God will accept you. It did not say, Care not about opinion, care not about doctrine, if only your life is right. Cornelius, whose life was blameless and exemplary, still needed Christ, and the Holy Spirit too, for his salvation. His diligent use of the light he had, brought him more light: such is God's rule: but it did not enable him to dispense with it. What showed God's acceptance was, God's teaching, God's illumination; not God's acquiescing in his condition, and leaving him as he was. And when that teaching, when that illumination came, what was it? It was a narrative: it was a history: it was a testimony of certain things which had happened, which had been done, upon this earth of ours: in short, it was the account of a Person; of One who, though

Himself man, had altogether changed and reversed man's condition; had shown Himself superior to the whole power and empire of evil; had broken the yoke of sin and Satan in instances numerous enough and decisive enough to show that He could do it in all; had lived a life such as never man lived, and spoken words such as never man spake; had then given His very life as a ransom for many; had died upon the cross to take away sin, and after dying had also risen again to be the living High Priest, the Mediator and the Advocate with God, of all who believe; to be both the Judge of human kind, and also the Atonement and the Propitiation for human sin. Such was the Gospel as preached by an Apostle to the first convert of our Gentile world. It was a narrative of facts: it was the history of a Person. It was our Apostles' Creed which formed the original Gospel to the Gentiles.

And is it not so still? Is it not the faith of a Person, even of our Lord Jesus Christ, which still removes mountains, still converts, regenerates, strengthens, purifies? *This is the victory that overcometh the world*, even *our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? Purifying their hearts by faith.* The Gospel of our salvation is the revelation of a Saviour.

And has that Gospel now lost its savour? Must we look out for some other because the first is worn out? So the world judges, and the Church has too much caught the infection. We fear that even Christian Sermons are too much estimated now by their eloquence or their novelty, and too little by their proclamation of Christ Himself as the Redeemer of the lost and the Life of the dead. In the same degree are we in danger of losing sight of the Apostolical maxim, and with it of that which makes the whole fire and force of our ministry, *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.* God help us all, my brethren, if it be so—us in our place, and you in yours—to come back to the simplicity and (with it) to the strength of St Peter's first Sermon to the Gentiles!

2. God in a remarkable manner bare it witness. While

the brief narrative was still proceeding, the very gift of Pentecost was poured upon the hearers. *The fire of the Lord fell*, and attested the sacrifice. By an inversion of which we possess no other record in Scripture, the inward gift preceded the outward dedication. Elsewhere Baptism went first, and the gift of the Spirit followed. Here it is the gift of the Spirit which demands and justifies the Baptism. God is a God of order, but He is not restricted by His own laws. Nothing less than the Pentecostal sign would have furnished an irresistible argument for this first Gentile Baptism. *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they* (the objectors) *held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Yet, lest any should draw from this inversion an argument against the importance of forms, it was required that the outward sign should follow, since it could not precede, the inward grace. Though the Holy Spirit had already fallen upon them, still they must be baptized in the name of the Lord. How presumptuous then, in later times, to say, 'Because the form is not all, therefore the form is nothing: if I have the Spirit, I may dispense with the baptismal water.' There is too much of this tendency in all of us, to argue and cavil where God has spoken. God has been pleased, in His two holy Sacraments, to remind us that in this life we are body as well as soul, and that the two elements of our being are wonderfully and fearfully commingled. The body acts upon the soul; the soul, in all its volitions, must act through the body. God knows this: God made it so to be. In the two Sacraments therefore, of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper, He has been pleased to recognize the use of the body in the things of the soul. He has been pleased to testify to realities unseen through the medium of things material and corporeal. *The washing of water* must accompany *the word* in our admission, and the participation of the bread and the wine must assist the spiritual communion in our support and sustentation.

Those who talk slightingly of forms are seldom those who

know most of the Spirit. Not without form, though not by forms only, can the work of Christ, which is the work of human salvation, be carried forward in the world. It has been truly said that, if the doctrine of the Gospel had been launched in the world without the institution of a Church—that is, a society cemented by ordinances—to give it body and substance in the face of the world, it might have waxed fainter and feebler, generation by generation, until at last it actually died out and vanished away. *The Church* is called in Scripture *the pillar and ground of the truth.* The Church—that is, the congregation of faithful men united by the possession of God's Word and Christ's Sacraments—is that which supports and bears up the whole fabric of truth and revelation. And we all know, from our own experience, how much our faith, whether it be weak or whether it be strong, owes to the possession amongst us of a house of prayer, regular seasons of worship, and a standing ministry to lead and to guide and (as God enables it) to quicken our devotion. Take away all these things, or any of these things, and where should we be? Destroy this temple, to rise no more from its ruins; make its services slovenly, rare, or repulsive; let there be no one to go in and out before you in the exercise of a regular ministration; let there be no visitation of the sick, no care for the poor, no catechizing of the young, no word of comfort, advice, or warning, to such as stand in need of each; and who does not know how serious would be the loss to himself and to the cause of good in the place in which our lot in life has fallen? I know not whose faith would stand the test of an utter denial of all help either from public worship or from private ministrations; an absolute removal of that candlestick, the Church, which is not indeed, but which yet holds, the light of the word, the lamp of the truth.

Let us not lose, my brethren, by supineness or lethargy of soul, the advantages which God has given us. *Freely* indeed we *have received:* let us thankfully use, let us *freely give. Thou, O God, sentest a gracious rain upon Thine inheritance, and refreshedst it when it was weary. Thy congregation shall dwell therein:*

for Thou, O God, hast of Thy goodness prepared for the poor. May He of His infinite mercy give us first that preparation of the heart, and then also that answer of peace and grace, both of which, alike and equally, are from above, *coming down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.*

LECTURE VI.

A HELPING HAND.

ACTS XI. 23.

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

So great an event as the admission of the first Gentile into the Church of God, could not pass without notice, enquiry, and even complaint. We all know what the force of prejudice is: and of all prejudices none was ever so deeply rooted as the spirit of religious exclusiveness in the heart of a Jew. He could not understand how there could be any other way of entrance for a Gentile into God's favour, save only through the narrow door of proselytism and of circumcision.

Accordingly, when St Peter returned to Jerusalem after that solemn scene at Cæsarea of which we read last Sunday, he was at once met by the indignant remonstrances of what may be called the narrow party in the Church of the capital of Judaism. *Thou wentest in*, we hear, *to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.* As usual in all cases of misunderstanding, where there is a real good will and good intention on both sides, a simple statement of the facts cleared up everything. St Peter told them of his vision at Joppa, and of the voice that followed and expounded it. *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* His mind thus prepared for some relaxation, he knew not what,

of ceremonial rigidity—for some extension, he knew not what, of the sympathies and charities of a Christian—he finds already at the door of the house three persons summoning him to Cæsarea. A divine intimation within bids him to accept the call. Taking with him a competent number of impartial witnesses, to attest the circumstances which might be about to unfold themselves, he journeys to Cæsarea. There he hears of a vision, the very counterpart and index of his own, by which the summons to himself had been suggested and inspired. He begins to speak. He has just touched upon the Gospel history; has told of the life of Jesus and of His death, of His resurrection and manifestation, of His office as the Judge and of His office as the Propitiation. While he yet speaks, the infallible sign of the Divine presence, the visible and audible proof (familiar to him from the great Pentecost) of the Holy Spirit's working, is vouchsafed to those who listen. He remembered the Saviour's promise, *Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost:* and how could he doubt that the gift of that Baptism justified the administration of the other? that the presence of the inward grace demanded the application of the outward sign? *Can any man*, he had asked aloud in the house of Cornelius, *forbid the water? What was I*, he asks now of the gainsayers at Jerusalem, *that I could forbid God*—the word is the same in the two cases—*that these should not be baptized, who had received the Holy Ghost as well as we?* The question was its own answer. Prepossession and prejudice could not stand before it. *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and* even *glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Thus was the main question decided. The Gentiles must be recognized as members, equally with the Jews, of the Church of Christ. On what terms they should be thus recognized; whether on condition of keeping the Law as well as believing the Gospel; was a question not yet opened, but destined to exercise a powerful influence on the peace of the Church in days of which we shall presently read the record.

Simultaneously, or nearly so, with this great event, the con-

version of Cornelius, a wider work of good was going on, under God's Providence, beyond the region of Palestine. We have read of the great scattering which arose on the death of Stephen. The 8th chapter told us that the whole Church at Jerusalem, except the Apostles only, was *scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria.* And here we read that the dispersion and its consequences spread more widely still. Through Phenice, or Phenicia, on the coast of the Mediterranean, north of Palestine—through the neighbouring island of Cyprus, and even to the great city of Antioch, the metropolis of Syria—journeyed far and wide these heralds of the Gospel, causing even *the fierceness of* persecuting *man* to *turn to God's praise.* Up to this time they had confined their ministry to the Jews. *But some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene*—we read, you remember, in the 2nd chapter, of *the parts of Libya about Cyrene* as furnishing some of the strangers in Jerusalem, and doubtless also some of the Christian converts, on the great day of Pentecost —*who, having come to Antioch, began to speak unto the Greeks,* or (according to another reading) *to the Grecian Jews, preaching the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus.*

If *the Grecians* spoken of were only the Greek-speaking Jews —the Jews resident in foreign lands, and using as their ordinary speech the Greek language—there would be nothing new in the event described: for from the very first there had been in this sense, as we read expressly in the 6th chapter, *Grecians* as well as *Hebrews* within the pale of the Christian Church. But the remarkable thing was, that now, not only in the single instance just read of at Cæsarea, but in more distant parts of the Empire, Gentiles were beginning to enter the Church without passing through the gate of Judaism.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, with these preachers to the Gentiles: God set His seal to the work, by giving them the Holy Spirit even as He had done to the Jewish believers: *and a great number which believed turned unto the Lord.*

Tidings of this important work reached erelong the ears of the Church at Jerusalem; and in pursuance of their usual

practice—of which the 8th chapter gave us an example—they sent out a special representative to observe and report upon the facts. In this instance the messenger of the Church was that holy man of whom we read in the 4th chapter that he gave the first instance of entire self-devotion to the cause of Christ and His people by selling his land for the benefit of the Christian community. Here we learn more of his character. *They sent forth Barnabas*, that he should go *as far as Antioch: who, when he arrived, and saw the grace of God*, saw God's favour and blessing so evidently and so largely bestowed, *was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. And a large multitude was added to the Lord. And he went forth to Tarsus to seek Saul; and having found him he brought him to Antioch. And it happened to them even for a whole year to be assembled in the congregation, and to teach a large multitude: and* it happened *that in Antioch first of all the disciples were called Christians.*

A prediction of coming famine conveyed to the Church of Antioch by a prophet named Agabus, and fulfilled not long afterwards during the same reign of Claudius, led the disciples of that place, in a true spirit of Christian charity and believing forethought, to begin at once a collection for the expected sufferers in Judæa. And this collection was carried to the managing elders at Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

1. Barnabas was *a good man:* not one of those stern, rigid, unloving men, who think their work done when they have just borne a testimony; but a kindly, benevolent, and beneficent man; one who had first given up his all for his brethren, and then, as the best of gifts, as that without which the other would have been valueless, gave himself. How beautifully every part of the description hangs together. What he had done, and what he was now doing, is explained and accounted for by what he was. *A good man, and full of the Holy Ghost*, of that Divine Spirit which is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be*

entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy; full also of *faith*, of that power of looking above and beyond earth, of apprehending the future and beholding the invisible, which makes sacrifice easy and the heavenly mind natural. That was his character, his Christian character. Whatever he may have had from nature—perhaps a kindly disposition, an amiable temper, a loving heart—we know not—he certainly had not from nature his *fulness of the Holy Ghost and of faith.*

2. And now as to his work. *When he came, and saw the grace of God, he was glad.* There are persons who are not glad when they see the grace of God. Sometimes it only reproves, convicts, and therefore irritates them. As taking pleasure in the wickedness of others is the last stage of sin, so a genuine delight in the holiness of others is perhaps the highest step in grace. To many of us, I fear, the sight of another's goodness is not a cause of joy. If this is so, we ought indeed to suspect ourselves. We who pray, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done*, ought to be glad when we see the faintest sign of either. If we are not glad, there must be an unsoundness somewhere; a want of zeal at least, if not a want of sincerity.

He was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. Barnabas was so named by the Apostles to express his character. He was *a son of consolation.* But that word *consolation* is the same, in the original language, with *exhortation* or *encouragement.* He *exhorted* them all, might be rendered, he *consoled* or he *comforted* them all. We have often remarked that the Holy Scriptures know of no such comforting as stops with itself. To comfort is, in God's language, to encourage, to cheer on, to animate to nobler efforts and a more pure devotion. That was what Barnabas, *Son of consolation*, did when he saw the grace of God at Antioch. He consoled by exhorting, by encouraging, by cheering on. How opposite is this to the teaching of many. A cold chilling statement of duty, or a stern and repulsive reproof for disobedience, this is, too often, all that we get from those who are charged with our oversight in a family or in the congregation. But that

exhortation is not Christian, which is not an encouragement, a cheering on; a saying, *Thus far have you come: now press on to this beyond.*

The holy Apostle of whom we are reading was able to feel, with regard to the converts at Antioch, that they had indeed found Christ. And therefore his exhortation, his encouragement, could be safely and surely this, *As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him:* as ye have turned to the Lord, so with purpose of heart cleave to Him. It is the same word by which our Lord Himself expressed the attendance upon Him of the multitudes who had followed Him into the wilderness. *I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat.* They had been *cleaving to Him* for three days in a desert place. In a higher, a spiritual sense, it is so here. The business of one who has come to Christ, is to continue with Him. The business of one who has joined himself to Christ, is to cleave to Him; to wait upon Him for the daily guidance, the daily supplies, the daily healing, and the daily strength.

And do not the words themselves say to us, that there is a difficulty in doing this? that there is a temptation to look off from Christ, to leave Him, to walk no more with Him? Yes, we all find that, hard as it is to come to Him, it is harder still to stay with Him. It is difficult to bend the stubborn will, to bow the proud neck, so as to stoop to accept Him as the Saviour of the lost and of the vile. But it is yet more difficult, when that first humbling is accomplished, and when hope and comfort have reentered the soul through the sacrifice and the mediation of Jesus Christ, then to remain. We seem to have got what we came for: why should we stay? It needs a long and often a bitter experience to make a man feel his own weakness and his own dependence. We are all too much like children, eager to walk alone, till repeated falls bring us back humbled to the guiding hand of which we had thought to be independent.

And we remark how opposite are the causes which lead us to walk carelessly or intermittently with Jesus. Sometimes it is

the self-confidence of a little strength gained; the ungrateful treatment, by one to whom Christ has shown mercy, of the very Benefactor from whom he has received it. Sometimes it is the mere weariness of hope long deferred: we have waited long upon Christ, and He has not seemed to look upon us. Sometimes it is the vexation of one who finds himself perpetually falling, and is tempted to say, What is the use of praying? my life is even more sinful than before I first called upon a Saviour: I will trifle with Him no more; I must walk alone, and guard my own steps as I may. And need I say that it is sometimes the presence of direct temptation, which makes us walk loosely and negligently with Jesus? the influence of the world, closing us in on every side, and making us say even as it says; calling evil good, and good evil; calling the seen real, and the temporal eternal: or else the power of the flesh, making some desired indulgence so necessary to us that we must have it (we say) if we die for it; some evil desire or sinful lust so fixing itself in our bosom that we cannot even pray to be rid of it: or else, once again—for this too is possible—the subtle whisper of the devil himself, suggesting doubts to the inmost soul as to the power or the very being of Christ or of God; saying in the secret ear, *Yea, hath God said?* or, *God doth know that it is not so;* or, *Ye shall not surely die: on the contrary, Ye shall be as gods?* This earliest and most often repeated temptation, embracing in itself the two other, and giving them their edge and their sting, is evermore drawing souls away from Him who is their life, and necessitating again and again the very exhortation of the text, that they who have once turned to the Lord should with purpose of heart cleave to Him.

The words seem to have a special application to those younger members of the Church who are about to seal upon themselves the vows of their Baptism. O for the persuasive word of an Apostle, O for that Divine grace which alone made even an Apostle's word effectual, to keep those faithful to Christ who are now about to come to Him! May we see in them the steady frequenters, while life lasts, of God's House and of Christ's Table.

May we see in them examples of that true godliness which has the promise of this life and of that which is to come. And that it may be so, God grant to them that blessed spirit of watchfulness and holy fear, that mistrust of self and that trust in Him, that earnestness not to fail or come short of the heavenly calling, of which it is the sure effect to keep them close to Him whose grace is sufficient for the most sinful, and whose strength is made perfect in weakness.

3. It is one beautiful trait in the character of Barnabas, that he was ever helping forward those whose position in the Church of Christ was less clear or less established than his own. When Saul arrived in Jerusalem three years after his conversion, and the disciples were all afraid of him, not believing that he, so lately a persecutor, could indeed be one of themselves; it was Barnabas who took him and brought him to the Apostles; declaring how he had seen the Lord in the way, and had already preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And here also, when a new field of labour was so marvellously whitening to the harvest, we find Barnabas, before he could set himself to the reaping, going forth to Tarsus to seek Saul; remembering, no doubt, the energy and devotion of his character, and also (it may be) those intimations which had already been vouchsafed to him of a special mission and apostleship to the Gentiles. The Scriptures are full, and the records of the Church in all times are full also, of the effects of a helping hand given at critical moments to promising but undeveloped characters. It was thus that Aquila and Priscilla took to them Apollos, when he knew only the preliminary baptism of John, and *expounded to him the way of God more perfectly*. It was thus that in the earliest days of the Gospel Andrew found his own brother Simon, saying to him, *We have found the Messias*, and brought him to Jesus. Alas, how much have we to answer for, the very best of us, in discouragements, or at least in a want of attraction and encouragement, to the weaker faith or colder temperament of others in the things of God. It is easier, no doubt, for a Christian to live in his own little circle of congenial friends,

of persons already one with him in conviction and manner of life, forgetful of the unleavened mass or of the imperfect and half-formed elements around him. And some men even avow the principle: they do not even profess to mix with any but decided Christians. And we well know that each man is bound to be considerate of his own safety: he is not to throw himself wilfully amidst evil influences, on the plea that he would counteract those influences and turn them into good. There are perhaps those who are as yet scarcely ripe for influencing, and must take good heed lest they rather learn evil than communicate good. But assuredly he is no Christian, who cares not to draw others after him in Christ's service. *Barnabas departed to Tarsus, for to seek Saul;* and the result was, that by their joint labours they did what no single-handed toil could have accomplished, in the instruction and edification and enlargement of the Church. Surely our language, sometimes at least and to some one, ought to be that beautiful invitation of the lawgiver of Israel, *We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.*

4. Finally, *the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.* That name which it is now an affront to refuse to any man, was once a term of distinction and even of reproach. St Peter speaks (in one of the three passages of Holy Scripture in which the name occurs) of a man *suffering as a Christian;* that is, undergoing shame and even punishment for the crime of being a Christian. Thus wonderfully has God established in the earth that holy religion which sprang originally from an obscure corner of a disregarded and despised land. What might it not have been now, if its own orders had been even faintly obeyed, and they who bore the name of Christ had indeed *gone into all the world, and preached the Gospel to every creature?*

For ourselves, my brethren, let us ask before we separate this evening, Who is a Christian? Who rightfully bears that

honoured name which was given, first, perhaps in mockery, at Antioch? *The disciples were called Christians.* Then, first we must be disciples of Christ. And what then is a disciple?

(1) He is a learner, he is a follower, he is a scholar, of Christ. He is one who comes to Christ to be taught, and continues with Him, cleaves to Him, to learn. Does not that description condemn some of us? Are we as yet even learners in Christ's School? Do not some of us say, I know enough: I have no need to learn? Do not some of us leave the books of that Divine school quite unopened? the book of Nature, the book of Providence, the book of conscience, the book of reflexion and of self-knowledge, the book of the Word of life? Which of us came hither to-night to learn? Which of us goes away having learned something? A Christian is Christ's scholar; and Christ's scholar is one who is learning of Christ.

(2) But a Christian is more than a learner of Christ. He is one who belongs to Christ; one who is of Christ's party, on Christ's side, in the world; one who is not ashamed of Christ, but regards and uses His name as his own chief honour and chief joy. It is true of all of us, that (in the words of the Gospel) Christ *has taught in our streets;* but the question will be, in the day of judgment, Hast thou *done the things which He said?* Hast thou had in thee *the mind which was in Him?* Hast thou been, like Him, self-denying and self-forgetting, meek and peaceable, poor in spirit and pure in heart? Hast thou *lived because He lived?* by virtue of a daily spiritual communication between thee and Him? Hast thou set thyself day by day to walk as He walked, and couldest thou say, in any sure sense, like St Paul, *It is no more I that live, but Christ liveth in me?*

By these and suchlike questions may the honest judge themselves, that they be not judged of the Lord. God give us all grace so to try and condemn ourselves now, that we may at last *have confidence, and not be ashamed before Christ at His coming.*

LECTURE VII.

A SHORT-LIVED TRIUMPH.

ACTS XII. 5.

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.

WE have seen the Church in conflict with religious bigotry: now we are to see it assailed by open ungodliness. This chapter gives us the account of a royal persecution. We see it in its beginning, in its progress, and in its end. We see it in its success, in its failure, and in its punishment. We have before us a whole career, in its pride and its humiliation, its triumph and its discomfiture, its short-lived arrogance and its frightful dismay. That is one aspect of the chapter. That is its aspect towards them that are without. Another is its aspect towards the Church within. It shows what danger is, and what anxiety is, and what death itself is, to the Christian; just how much, and just how little; enough to bring out great graces, enough to exercise faith and patience, a spirit of dependence and a spirit of supplication; not enough to cause one real misgiving, or to make a single true heart doubt where happiness lies, where safety, where strength, where victory.

Let us look first on the dark side of this picture. There is a king *putting forth*, or *laying on*, *his hands*, *to vex*, that is, to harass and injure, *certain of the Church;* certain of those who belong to God's congregation, to God's assembly, gathered out of

a world lying in wickedness into a body in which He Himself, through His Son, by His Spirit, continually dwells.

The name of this king is Herod. He is one of that Idumean or Edomite family, which by vigour and ambition, by servility and flattery, by unscrupulous scheming and (when it suited them) merciless cruelty, contrived to fill a conspicuous page in the history of the chosen people. *Herod the king* of whom this chapter tells was grandson to that other *Herod the king* some of whose deeds are recorded in the 2nd chapter of St Matthew's Gospel. The father of this Herod, Aristobulus by name, was son to the other Herod, and was murdered, like others of his family, by his own father's command. The Herod of this chapter, known as Herod Agrippa, had contrived, by a succession of manœuvres, to possess himself of all the dominions held by his grandfather. He was a man of address and artifice, little likely to scruple at any crime by which he might ingratiate himself with the people over which he ruled.

His first act of aggression upon the despised and hated Church, was directed against the Apostle James. *He killed James the brother of John with the sword.* Such is the short record of the first Apostolical martyrdom. And it is the only Apostolical martyrdom of which we have any record in Scripture. Far more was told of the martyrdom of the deacon Stephen. Such is the character of the historical Scriptures everywhere. One thing is dwelt upon, and another briefly told. Simplicity, naturalness, undesignedness, absence of rhetorical trick and stage effect, this we notice throughout, and we think we can see it to be of God.

Thus then one of those who *from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word;* one of those who had *seen with their eyes and handled with their hands the Word of Life;* who had been with Him through His ministry, had beheld Him die, and had also seen Him risen; passed away early from his work to his reward. It was scarcely fifteen years, I suppose, since he had first heard that little word on the sea of Galilee, which had changed him from a fisherman into a *fisher of men;* had brought

him into daily converse with the Lord of men and of Angels, and made him *count all things but loss* that he might *win Christ.* He had been one of the favoured few in various striking occurrences of the Saviour's life and ministry; in the death-chamber of Jairus' daughter, on the holy mount of Transfiguration, and in the mysterious agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had been one of two brothers, who, in days of ignorant zeal, had proposed to call fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village which refused them entrance; and who, again, in days of a no less ignorant ambition, had asked to sit on His right hand and on His left hand in their Master's glory. *Boanerges, sons of thunder,* He had named them, in days when the impetuosity of nature had not yet been checked by the influence of grace; and when the sterner lessons of a deep self-knowledge had not yet matured into humility a character too self-asserting and self-confident for heaven. But now this was past; past too the mighty transformation of Pentecost, and the noble, the self-governed, the devoted years of the ministry which that day had opened. To him, first of the brothers, is that prophecy fulfilled, *Ye shall drink indeed of my cup* of suffering, *and be baptized with the baptism* of blood *that I am baptized with.*

And see, then, we say, how lightly the inspired record passes over that great transition. *He killed James the brother of John with the sword.* Not one word of the circumstances; of the length of the notice, or the manner of the preparation. No deathbed scene, no dying testimony; save indeed that best of testimonies which the death itself afforded. He had given his life in one sense: now he gave it in another. He had sacrificed self, now he offers life, upon Christ's altar. Nothing is made of it. It was natural that he who had really given the one, should, when it was demanded, really give the other. No word of lamentation is bestowed upon the exchange of life for immortality, of the temporal for the eternal. He did his duty; he flinched not from a whole service: in him prophecy was fulfilled; and to him, as a matter of course, belonged the recompence of the reward. They who looked upon that early martyrdom, from

amidst the labours and trials of the Apostolical life below, were not likely to feel regret for him who was so much the gainer.

But so it is: God appoints, and man submits: man, Christian man, can say with sincerity, whichever or whatever be his portion, *Thy will, O God, not mine, be done.*

The fate of the next destined victim is widely different. He too seems to be marked out for martyrdom. The appetite for blood is ever whetted by its indulgence: and thus Herod, *because he saw that* the murder of James *pleased the Jews, added to take Peter also. He apprehended him, and put him in prison, giving him in charge to four quaternions of soldiers,* to four sets of four soldiers each, *to guard him; intending after the passover,* which was now going on, *to bring him up,* for trial and execution, *to,* or rather *for,* before, in the sight and for the gratification of, *the people.* It was a crowded time in Jerusalem: strangers from all parts of the world flocked together to the festival: and the spectacle of an Apostle's execution was to be their sport and pastime in the intervals of religious duty. Such is religion, when it is once possessed and saturated with bigotry, fanaticism, and party zeal.

All seemed to promise well and surely for the persecutor and his people. *Peter then was kept in the prison:* by night and by day he is the one care of sixteen armed men: the four watches of the night are parcelled out amongst them: between two of them, an arm chained to each, he even sleeps; and two others keep the entrance, the one of the cell, the other of the prison. Surely nothing can elude such vigilance? Surely the prey is secure, and the captive marked for the slaughter? So might man well judge. There is one, there is but one, impediment. *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but there was prayer earnestly going on, by the Church, unto God concerning him.* Is there not great meaning in that little word *But?* Peter was safe in the prison; all had prospered thus far; Herod and his flatterers might well promise themselves an easy triumph: *BUT there was prayer going on earnestly.* The Church, God's congregation, God's assembly, below, was calling in, by night and day, a help, not of man,

to counteract man's design. Little would Herod or his friends account of that; they might point to the iron gate, the massive bolts, the four quaternions: but faith, in spite of, and in full view of, all these things, still prays; prays earnestly, prays believingly, prays waitingly and watchingly; and therefore no Christian can account the deed done: to-morrow's dawn may be fixed for the execution; but He who *neither slumbers nor sleeps* has Israel in His keeping, and let no man presume to say, apart from Him, what one day or one night may bring forth.

The last night is come, but not gone. Peter sleeps, while the Church prays: it is their time for action, it is his for repose. His work now is to rest: *in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you. His heart is established, and does not shrink:* what if his martyrdom is to follow close upon that of the faithful James, and they who were so lately *partners* in the cares of a fisher's calling on the sea of Galilee, and have since been associated for a few short years in a noble ministry and Apostleship, are to be speedily reunited in a blessedness not of this world? *lovely and pleasant in their lives, and even in their deaths not divided? The same night Peter was sleeping:* on each side of him a soldier, and two without, guarding the prison.

And behold, an Angel of the Lord (God) stood near, presented himself, *and a light shone in the cell:* it was no mere dream; there was a light, betokening a divine presence, and testifying of reality: *and he smote Peter on the side, and roused him, saying, Arise quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.* There is to be no sign of haste or precipitation. Every part of his preparation is to be made in order: the departure is to be no flight: the girdle and the sandals, the tunic and the cloke, all are to be in place: and not until *all things are ready* is the word of command uttered, to follow the Angel from the prison.

Peter obeys, but with the half-consciousness of one who walks in sleep. *He wist not that it was true (real) which was done by the Angel; but thought he saw a vision.* Yet, all the time, the deliverance is real: they pass a first guard and a second, till they

reach the iron gate, closing in the prison-precincts, and actually leading into the city: that gate opens for them, without key or force; and then, after guiding him along one street, the purpose of the intervention being now accomplished, *the Angel forthwith departed from him.* God does nothing in vain: He begins where man must end, and ends where man can begin.

The deliverance thus achieved, reflection follows. Thus far Peter has been stupefied with the suddenness of the revulsion: death was staring him in the face, and lo, he walks free through the streets of Jerusalem. Who does not feel the naturalness of the description? *He comes to himself.* He had been (such is the figure) out of himself; his self-possession (as we speak) had been disturbed and shaken; now he is himself again: and what can his inference be, from all that has occurred and from that which now is, save that *the Lord* must have *sent forth His Angel, and rescued me out of the hand of Herod, and* from *all the expectation of the people of the Jews?*

And whither shall he now betake himself? He knows the deep anxiety with which the Church of which he is a *pillar* must have regarded his imprisonment: so he bends his steps first to one of those homes of the Church, one of those private houses in which the congregation met for worship while the Church was still young and militant, that he may relieve the distress which he knows must have befallen them, and carry in person the first tidings of safety and deliverance. The whole scene is vividly before us. His knock brings to the door a maiden of the household; not at once to open—for they were hard and evil times, and peril might lurk in the admittance of a stranger—but to hearken to the voice which should tell its errand, and report upon it to those within. The voice which calls to her is one well known. She had heard it often, we doubt not, leading the devotions of that pious home: she knew it at once for Peter's, and for very joy ran in before she opened. Her tidings were incredible. *They said unto her, Thou art mad. But she persisted in affirming that so it was. And* then *they said, It is his Angel;* it must be one of those *ministering spirits* who have in their

charge *the heirs of salvation*, and who, in the character of the Angels of Christ's *little ones*, *do always* (as He Himself said) *behold the face of His Father who is in heaven*. But no: there is no mistake here, and no apparition: the Angel's office is ended, and Peter himself, in flesh and blood, is seen, when they open, to stand before the gate. Silencing with a motion of the hand their eager and wondering exclamations, he tells his own story, and bids them, while he departs elsewhere for security and concealment, to carry the report of his miraculous deliverance to the surviving *James*, *the Lord's brother*, *and to the brethren* at the head-quarters of the Church.

The sacred narrative would be incomplete without a painful record of the end of the persecutor and of his enforced instruments. Just as, in the ancient Church's history, when the faithful three were thrown by the order of the Eastern king into the burning fiery furnace, *the flame of the fire slew those men* who acted as his executioners; even so the captivity of Peter was fatal to the soldiers to whose charge he had been consigned. When the day broke, the day which was to have shown the spectacle of his execution, and the prisoner himself was found to have vanished from the prison-house; vain were the asseverations of his keepers to screen them from the charge of negligence or of collusion: *when Herod had sought for him and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death.* These are *the tender mercies of the wicked.* Disappointed rage must have its victim. If it cannot be an Apostle, it must be an Apostle's keeper. But the retribution ends not there.

Herod himself goes down from Jerusalem to Cæsarea There was at this time an angry feud between him and the people of Tyre and Sidon on the frontier of his dominions. They were ill able to part with his friendship, because, as in ancient times, they were dependent upon supplies of corn furnished from districts under his rule. They came to him therefore in solemn embassy, and gaining over first to their interest the king's chamberlain, they implored reconciliation and amity. This was the crowning point of Herod's triumphs. With an ambition

glutted with success, and a vanity inflated by flattery, he appeared, on a set day, in royal apparel—the historian Josephus tells us that it was a tissue of silver thread, which shone like the light in the rays of the morning sun—and made an oration to these submissive auditors. Flattery ran on into impiety, and they all with one accord shouted, *It is the voice of a God, and not of a man.* This cry was the signal of the Divine punishment. *Immediately an Angel of the Lord (God) smote him, because he gave not God the glory, and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

Thus the chapter before us becomes an epitome of all history. In it the world and the Church are arrayed on opposite sides, the hosts of God and of Satan being marshalled for the encounter. On the one side there is rank and dignity and kingly power; a great name, a lawful authority acting by the appliances of guards and prison-houses, of implements of torture and preparations for execution. On the other side there is poverty and obscurity and insignificance; a prisoner unknown to fame, and a sentence which will bring after it no reproach of injustice. The world will have it all its own way; and the world's applause will follow the world's action. In the beginning all is success: the first victim falls unheeded, and tyranny is emboldened to add the second. No sign of opposition is yet visible: *to-morrow shall be as this day*, and the execution is as sure as the sentence which commands it. There is but one obstacle, and that is not worth mention. A few obscure men and women are praying in some humble home for God's interposition. They ask Him to put forth, as and when He will, the arm of His strength; to show that He is with them; to let it be seen that Christ's Church is His Church, and Christ's cause His cause on the earth. Little can this do to stay the world's chariot in its career of victory! And yet, when we look again, *the prey is taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered.* The prison is still shut, and the keepers stand without and within for its security: but he whom they guard is gone from them. He is gone forth, to resume his labours for Christ, in teaching and guiding, in administering and ruling;

and the world has lost its triumph. Presently, not disappointment only, but punishment, overtakes the enemy of God: sin has found him out, and a loathsome putrefying corpse is all that remains of Herod in the palace of Cæsarea. And *the word of God*, all the time, is *growing and multiplying*. Its offer of pardon and life, of grace and sanctification, is entering new lands and penetrating other hearts. Its quiet toils, whether of piety or of charity, are still working their way: *Barnabas and Saul* have *fulfilled their ministry* at Jerusalem, and returned to Antioch: the waters have closed over the enemy's triumph, and the silence of dismay and despair has succeeded to the boastings of impiety and unbelief. *The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.*

The practical lesson for all of us is, that we learn the power, and practise the grace, of that *effectual fervent prayer* which *availeth much. Peter was kept in prison, but* constant *prayer was being earnestly made by the Church unto God for him.* Which of us would not have thought that the time for prayer was past? A few short hours must run their course, and then the prisoner will be led out to his execution. Even now he lies within stone walls and iron gates: he is chained, hand and arm, to his keepers; and he lies at this moment in the helpless inactivity of sleep. Why prolong the vain struggle? *Why trouble ye the Master any further?* The will of God is plainly spoken: our friend is *appointed unto death:* look off from the spectacle: think not of the doomed, but of the surviving. Thus speaks that *spirit of the world* which lingers even in the regenerate: we *judge the Lord by feeble sense*, and, where we see not a way, we conclude at once that there is none. And yet, even while we thus argue, there stands within that prison an Angel of God. A light shines around, and a voice speaks of exertion and of escape. With senses but half awake, yet with a quietness of resolution which confesses the Divine mandate, the prisoner is already dressing himself for his departure. A spell is upon the keepers that they raise not a finger, not a voice, for his detention. *My God hath sent His Angel, and hath shut the* very *lions' mouths, that they have*

not hurt me. The first ward is safely passed, and the second: the iron gate leading to the city has opened for him of its own accord: he walks abroad, in the chill night air, and is at large from fear of evil. Soon will his knock startle you in your dwelling, and for very gladness you will scarcely believe that it is he himself.

My brethren, these things *were written for our admonition;* for our reproof, and for our encouragement. If this be the power of prayer; if it be the appointed, the divinely appointed link, between the will of God to bless, and the actual bestowal of the blessing; where is our faith if we try it not, if we test not its efficacy? Which of us is not an unbeliever, if not in his creed, yet in his prayers? Which of us truly feels that prayer is speaking to God? that prayer is the communication between the needy and the All-sufficient, between the sinner and the All-holy, between the child that wants everything and the Father who is able and willing to supply all? Which of us is not scanty, hasty, perfunctory, unbelieving, in his prayers for himself? And which of us is not yet more so in his prayers for others? Who prays as he ought for temporal blessings; for bread to eat, and raiment to put on; for a helping hand in need, and a sympathizing voice in sorrow? Even in these things, *ye have not, because ye ask not.* But O, tenfold more in things spiritual: tenfold more in the matter of sins which want conquering, and duties which want fulfilling! Where is he amongst us who *wakens* himself *morning by morning to hear* God's voice and to seek God's help? Where is he who sets himself to the day's employments in the spirit of one who *prays without ceasing?* Where is he who long before midday has not lost altogether the dew of the morning, or who comes back to the fountain of grace to renew his strength, that, *having done all,* he may be found at eventide still *standing?* And where, O where, is he, who has ever tried amongst us, as these early disciples tried it, the grace of intercession? How narrow and bounded are our conceptions of the Omnipotence of God! how carnal and earthly our interpretation of the eternal promise, which bids us *ask and have, seek and find!* Let us try it for one another, as we have never yet

tried it. If any soul be tied and bound by its sin, let us pray God earnestly, and not faint, that He will open the door of that prisonhouse, and set the captive free; that His light may shine in the darkness, and the voice, not of an Angel, but of His own Holy Spirit, bid him gird himself and follow. If these things be done, assuredly *the Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear. The prayer of faith* can still (as it is written) *save the sick;* and they who pray one for another, earnestly, constantly, and in the name of Christ, shall still from time to time, through God's grace, *save a soul from death, and hide* in the Saviour's blood *a multitude of sins.*

LECTURE VIII.

THE SPIRIT'S CALL AND THE CHURCH'S MISSION.

ACTS XIII. 2.

The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

HITHERTO this Divine Book has had many subjects: henceforth it will have but one. The life of him who, next to the Divine Master Himself, is the great example of all ministers, and more especially of all missionaries; their example in simplicity and purity of doctrine; in singlemindedness, earnestness, charity, and self-devotion; in all that can ennoble man, recommend religion, honour Christ, or glorify God; is from this point onward to the very close of the Book to be the one yet varied subject of the whole narrative: and even then we shall be constantly reminded how much of it remains untold; how many deeds and words of St Paul are left unwritten; enough told to show him as he was, not enough to satisfy curiosity or to supersede research.

The first missionary journey, described in the 13th and 14th chapters, was limited to the island of Cyprus and a small part of Asia Minor. Its chief interest centres in a specimen, contained in this chapter, of St Paul's manner of addressing a Jewish con

gregation, and in a sample, contained in the following chapter, of his method of dealing with an audience of Gentiles. But for to-night we must be contented with the opening portion of the narrative; telling of the commission itself under which he acted, and of the new powers and capacities with which that commission armed him.

We have already considered the circumstances of that *wonderful conversion* which transformed Saul of Tarsus, the bitter and relentless enemy of the Gospel, into a believer and a Christian. We have traced his steps subsequently from Damascus, the scene of his change and of his Baptism and of his early preaching, into the wilderness of Arabia; thence back to Damascus; thence, three years after his conversion, to Jerusalem; thence home to Tarsus; thence, under the friendly guidance of Barnabas, to the great city of Antioch; thence on a charitable mission from that Church to Jerusalem; thence finally (in the last words of the 12th chapter) again to Antioch, where a large work of usefulness had opened before him in the regular instruction and supervision of a promising Christian community. It is in the midst of this work that the 13th chapter takes up the thread of his history.

The congregation at Antioch was under the instruction of several *prophets and teachers*. A prophet, in Scripture language, is not necessarily a predicter or foreteller of coming events: he is one who speaks for God, under God's special inspiration, whether for reproof or exhortation or simple instruction. A prophet was an inspired preacher. The gift of *prophecy* in this sense, and the gift of *teaching* which is here associated with it, were among the special powers communicated by the Holy Spirit in His supernatural working in the first age of the Church.

Among these prophets and teachers at Antioch were Barnabas, of whom we have read and shall read in this history; three other persons, of whom we know nothing for certain besides; and one, greater than all, who was to be the blessed Apostle of the Gentiles, St Paul himself.

On a certain occasion, as the Church at Antioch was engaged

in a solemn service of prayer and fasting, an intimation was given, probably through one or more of the prophets then present, which directed the special designation of two of their number to the Apostolical office. *As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate ye now for me Barnabas and Saul unto the work to which I have summoned them.*

The Holy Ghost said. My brethren, these words show us that we do not err in regarding the Holy Ghost as a Person; not a mere effluence or influence from God, not a mere power or operation of God, but a Person; One who has a will and an action of His own, even as St Paul himself says in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.* We do not err in saying Sunday by Sunday, *I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the prophets. O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us miserable sinners. The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

Separate them for the work. The word is, *Mark* them *off*, as by a boundary-line, from all others. It was this injunction of the Holy Spirit which made Barnabas an Apostle. He was not one of the twelve. He was not, like Matthias, added afterwards to supply a vacancy. And yet we call him, and keep an annual festival in memory of him as, *St Barnabas the Apostle.* The title is from Scripture. The 14th chapter says, *Which when the Apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of, they rent their clothes*, &c. Barnabas was made an Apostle by this special call of the Holy Ghost.

His companion was an Apostle by a double title. (1) He was already qualified for that office, in its original form and sense, by having *seen Jesus Christ* in His revelation to him at the moment of his conversion; and (2) he had received his designation to the office in the very words used by the Divine Master in announcing the purpose of that revelation. In the passage

now before us we have a special call and a particular mission. The messenger is ready: here is his message. *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

The work. The ministry is a business. It is not, as some have made it, an amusement or a pastime. It is not, as some would represent it, a title or a profession. It is a work. It was so to Barnabas and Saul. It is so in all times to all who understand it. For what, brethren, was Paul's work? What was it, I do not say in its circumstances, but in its aim and end? Was it not, to *turn* men *from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?* Was it not, to bring men, individual men, into *the obedience of faith?* Was it not, so to *warn* and so to *teach* men *in all wisdom*, as to *present every man* in the end *perfect in Christ Jesus?* What less, what else, is the aim of the ministry of this place, of this Church? St Paul had to pursue his object amidst opposition and ridicule, amidst obloquy and persecution, amidst danger and suffering: we have a quieter office; to live amidst friends and neighbours, amidst civilities and kindnesses, amidst religious professions and proprieties of worship: but have these things indeed affected the end and aim of our ministry? Have they made the quickening of consciences, the reformation of lives, the salvation of souls, less of a work than it was to prophets and to Apostles? Nay, are there not difficulties now to be overcome which had no existence then? difficulties arising out of that very softness and civility and complaisance, which at first sight seems to have diminished them?

Brethren, the ministry, like the Apostleship, is a work: the minister, like the Apostle, is, or ought to be, a working man. Will you not help him in his business? not by flattering, not by ministering to vanity or self-conceit, but, on the contrary, by setting before yourselves the object which he has in view for you, the so bringing every thought into obedience to the will of Christ *that you may be counted worthy to escape all those things which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man?*

Separate me Barnabas and Saul. The minister is one with

you in all the weaknesses and temptations and difficulties of man: he has no exemption, himself, from any infirmity, of body or mind, of soul or spirit, to which the humblest and the most imperfect are liable: but nevertheless he is, in one single sense, a *separated* man: there is a mark upon him, there is a boundary-line round him, which testifies to his having a definite calling, an express commission, without which he would feel it a presumption and an impertinence to stand where he stands or to speak to you as he speaks. I say not that any of us who now minister could plead a miraculous call or summons of the Holy Ghost designating us for the work of guiding and helping souls. But I do say that I hope there has been something of a real, though less emphatic, utterance of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who have undertaken it; something enabling them to answer, honestly however humbly, the first question addressed in our Church's Service to all who are Candidates for the ministry, *Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory and the edifying of His people?* And I hope also that there has been to each of us a real meaning in that solemn act of Ordination, by which we have been separated from all other callings, to the office of *ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* God give us grace to feel that office more and more deeply as a work, and to understand more and more fully how and in what sense we are separated to it.

Again and again we are reminded in Scripture that God is a God of order; *not the Author of confusion, but of peace, in all Churches of the saints.* The converts in the house of Cornelius were still to have the form, though they already had the substance, of Baptism; still to claim *the washing of water*, though they were already *baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.* Even so it is here. Even the express designation of the Holy Ghost does not supersede the outward form of Ordination. *While they ministered and fasted*, the Divine call came: *they fasted* again *and prayed*, they *laid on their hands* in solemn benediction, before they sent forth the new Apostles to their work. Let us

not sever what God has joined. He who knows what we are, and deals with us as He knows, will have the outward sign as well as the inward grace. We are body and spirit: and they who remember this, in religion as well as in business, are wisest in that wisdom which is from above. *Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid their hands upon them, they let them go.*

There must ever be something affecting in the departure of a missionary to his work. There is much in the thought of what he leaves, there is even more (when rightly viewed) in what he seeks, to impress and solemnize the minds of those who look on. If that man is not a mere idle dreamer, there must be something real in things unseen. That man is taking with him no instruments of art or of husbandry; he is not seeking fame or fortune in foreign lands; he is not a disappointed man, hiding himself from reproach or contempt in scenes where the eye of man will not follow him: none of these things: he believes himself to be entering upon a work; he believes himself to be carrying a message; he believes himself to be engaged in a living Master's service, and to be bearing a humble part in the establishment of an everlasting kingdom. Unless these things be all cunningly devised fables, that man's going preaches a solemn sermon to us who stay.

But surely of all missionary departures this upon which we look to-night is one of the most momentous. One of these men *has seen Jesus Christ;* has been turned from one course into the opposite by that sight; has been commissioned by Him to carry forth His name and His Gospel into every part of the earth. And both of these men have received a special summons from the Holy Ghost speaking by men's lips, and then a special ordination for the work on which they go forth. If this be not all a falsehood, we ought indeed to attend to the things which they say.

Starting from the city, followed no doubt by many earnest prayers and blessings from those who stay behind, they take the road towards the sea, and find themselves, after a sixteen miles' journey, at the fortified sea-port of Seleucia. From thence they

sailed to Cyprus, the native country of Barnabas; and landed at Salamis, the eastern port and former capital of the island. There, in conformity with the original commission and the constant practice of the Apostles, they addressed themselves first to the Jewish inhabitants of the city. *They preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.* They were accompanied by a younger kinsman of Barnabas; known to us from the preceding chapter as *John whose surname was Mark;* but known to us better still as the writer of the second Gospel, the briefest of all in its actual extent, but, of all the Gospels, the most full perhaps of those lively and graphic touches which indicate the recollections (whencesoever derived by him) of an eye-witness, as well as of a loving and devoted friend. In this first missionary journey St Mark acted as the *minister* or assistant of the two Apostles; especially, we may suppose, in the task of baptizing those who by their preaching had been brought to believe.

They passed through the whole island, so well known from early days to one of the travellers; and from the eastern capital arrived at length at the western, the city of Paphos, at that time the seat of the Roman government, and as such the residence of Sergius Paulus the Proconsul of the province. The character of this Roman magistrate is described in favourable terms. He was *a prudent man;* a man of capacity, intelligence, and good sense. He showed his candour and freedom of mind by desiring to hear the message of these unwonted visitors; which many men in his position would have regarded as only some new variety of that Jewish superstition which was treated with so much contempt alike by the rulers and by the philosophers of the time.

But there was an influence at work beside him, adverse to the entrance of the Word of God. We constantly read in those times of persons professing to possess powers of sorcery and supernatural wisdom, and exercising an extraordinary influence over the great men both of the Republic and the Empire. We all know how king Saul, when he felt that God had departed from him, sought the aid of witchcraft to fill the void: and just

so was it with men who had never known the true God, when their faith in idol-worship was utterly shaken, and in the instinctive feeling of their own absolute weakness they wanted counsel and strength for the ambiguous turning-points and critical emergencies of life.

Thus it was that even *a prudent man*, like this Proconsul of Cyprus, had with him, at the time here spoken of, *a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew* by descent, whose interest it was to *turn away* the mind of his patron *from* the reception of *the faith*. There they stood before him, the Apostle of truth and the emissary of falsehood; like Moses and the magicians in old times before Pharaoh king of Egypt; each professing to have with him *the great power of God*, and prepared to bring the controversy to the decisive test, *If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.* Was not this an occasion worthy of Divine interposition? Could any argument be so convincing, under such circumstances, and before that particular audience, as one which should give instant and undeniable proof that the one combatant was in the power of the other; that He who was with the Gospel was greater, in act and in deed, than he who was against it? Accordingly we find St Paul using here for the first time that miraculous power with which Christ had invested him for the assertion and maintenance of His cause below. *And now, behold, the hand of the Lord (God) is upon thee; and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about, seeking some to lead him by the hand.* The solemn and fearful scene had its due effect. *Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*

This was that supernatural power, of which St Paul speaks not unfrequently in his Epistles, as committed to him for the punishment of bold offenders against the truth of God or the holiness of His Church. In the exercise of this power, in Churches subsequently founded, he speaks of *delivering such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the soul might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus;* and warns a congregation, of

which he has cause to stand in doubt, that, if he visits them again, he *will not spare*. The words, and the things spoken of, may strike us as severe, as unlike the gracious and loving Gospel: but let us rather accept them as proofs of the danger as well as the sinfulness of sin; as warnings, merciful if they reach us in time, of the certainty of a coming judgment, and of the terrible fate of all those who live and die in their iniquity. If there be any truth in the great verities of judgment and eternity, of heaven and hell, we shall learn to estimate differently all those chastisements, and even all those punishments, by which God, whether in the first days or in our own, has sought to save His people from being finally *condemned with the world*. Surely to leave us altogether unwarned; to allow a man to run to every excess of riot, with health unbroken and conscience quiescent; to suffer strength and prosperity, a good name and a worldly success, to continue, to the end of this life, to be the portion of those who are *treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;* to send, in other words, no special warning of danger, until warning itself had ceased to be of value; all this, on the supposition of the truth of a future retribution, must surely be far more stern, and far more awful, in reality, than any number or any weight of Divine inflictions sent upon us while to listen may be to live. We may count St Paul harsh and unfeeling for putting forth his Apostolical powers in the punishment of obstinate sinners: yet surely, if we reflect, we shall deem it a more anxious and a more fearful condition still, to be living, as we live, in an age when no such signs of danger are visible, and when we may, if we will, sin on till we die, till the mercy-seat is empty and the thrones are set for judgment. These days, in which God seems so far from the earth, are more full of terror, to the thoughtful and reflecting soul, than any nearness of His presence testified by personal inflictions of suffering.

The Church itself sought for some centuries to fill the place towards her members, which the departure of Apostles had left vacant. In one of our own Services we are taught to look back

with regret upon times when Church discipline was not yet nominal. *In the primitive Church*, says our Commination Service, *there was a godly discipline, that at the beginning of Lent such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend.* Those days are passed. Where civil punishment does not reach a man, neither will the censures of the Church touch him. And we believe that He who promised to be with His Church alway has not even in this point left her destitute of His guidance. If the voice of public opinion, informed and influenced (though not yet absolutely swayed) by the voice of God, cannot restrain us, in these days of universal notoriety, from deeds of shame and darkness; neither should we be persuaded though Apostles rose to judgment, or an act of open penance were the consequence of every transgression and disobedience disclosed.

It is well thus: we believe it. But this very absence of punishment is, we say, to the right-minded, the most formidable of terrors. We fear, and have cause to fear, lest the being thus left unpunished should be a sign of the being *let alone*. We fear, and have cause to fear, lest we be only, like fallen spirits, *reserved* for punishment *unto the judgment of the great day*. We fear, and we have cause to fear, lest we be hardened in sin by present impunity; and lest the warning voice of conscience and of the Word, so long unheeded, should change, without our knowing it, into the verdict of condemnation and the sentence of death.

God grant that this be not so with any of us who now listen. We must hear, and fear. We must judge ourselves, that we may not be judged. In particular, let us accept with humility and thankfulness any intimations which God gives us in our national, domestic, or personal life, of the certainty of His observation, and of the reality of His cognizance. If sorrow comes, if sickness, if anxiety, if distress, if pain, if bereavement, if misgiving and a *heart failing for fear;* let us bless God, even while we suffer, and say, I thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast caused my sin to find

me out now, while suffering may be to me amendment, and chastisement repentance. We must look inward and look upward for ourselves, since none can come back to us from the dead to scare us from the place of torment. We must accept God's signs, as they meet us in the still small voice of conscience and of the Spirit; that so we may not be dismayed when *the sign of the Son of Man is seen in heaven*, and they only can stand who have *loved His appearing*.

LECTURE IX.

THE WORK OF LIFE AND THE END OF LIFE.

Acts xiii. 26.

David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep.

Our subject to-night is St Paul's first sermon.

It was delivered at a place called Antioch, in the district of Pisidia in Asia Minor.

From Paphos, the western capital of Cyprus, he had sailed to the north-west, and landing on the coast of Asia Minor, first visited Perga, a place six or seven miles inland in the district of Pamphylia. At this point, John surnamed Mark, who had started on the mission as the companion and minister of the two Apostles, left them and returned to Jerusalem. It was a sign, no doubt, of faintheartedness or lack of zeal; and as such St Paul at a later time remembered it with sufficient displeasure to make him refuse at all costs to accept him as his companion again.

It is comforting to know that in days later still the breach was healed. In the Apostle's first imprisonment at Rome, the same person, described as *Marcus, sister's son* (or rather *cousin*) *to Barnabas*, was one of the few, the very few, persons, of whom St Paul writes to the Colossians that they were his *fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God*, and *a comfort to him*. So that, my

brethren, in this world of change, there is sometimes a change for the better, God be praised for it; a change to greater resolution, greater self-devotion, and greater constancy. Though it is proverbially hard to retrace our steps, and recover the steep uphill path which alone leads to glory; yet *that which is impossible with men is possible with God*, and He who desires not the death of any sinner can fulfil even this for us. And thus even the declension, even the unfaithfulness, even the backsliding of Mark on this occasion, while it warns all, need not discourage any: *there is a sin not unto death;* and they who seek the grace of recovery shall by God's mercy find it.

The two Apostles, saddened perhaps by the defection of their comrade, but none the less strong in their own earnestness and constancy, bent their steps further inland, and reached at last, at a distance (I suppose) of nearly a hundred miles, the town of Antioch in Pisidia. It is said that the site of this place had long been lost to human knowledge, until, within the last thirty years, an English traveller, guided by landmarks which could not mislead, reached a position precisely corresponding with the descriptions of ancient geographers, and *felt, as he looked on the superb ruins around, that he was really on the spot consecrated by the labours and persecution of the Apostles Paul and Barnabas.*

Following that orderly course which they always prescribed to themselves, the two Apostles, on reaching this city, quietly waited for the return of the Sabbath, and then bent their steps towards the synagogue of the Jews. They took their places among the worshippers, and the regular service proceeded. The roll of the Law and the Prophets was brought, according to custom, out of the Ark; a chest placed in every synagogue on that side of the building which was nearest to Jerusalem: the regular lesson was read, first from the Law and then from the Prophets: and afterwards the rulers or presidents of the synagogue sent a message to the two strangers, inviting them to address to the congregation anything which might occur to them in the way of exhortation.

Upon this St Paul rose, and after motioning with his hand

for silence, opened the message which he had come so far to deliver.

Men of Israel, he said, *and ye that fear God*, Israelites by birth or Israelites by religion, *listen*. And to what? To a formal treatise on Christianity? to a stirring appeal to feeling, or a convincing demonstration of truth? Not this. Rather, a simple rehearsal of God's dealings with His ancient people, a calm recital of the leading topics of the national history, as though to bespeak a favourable hearing, and to give an assurance that his doctrine was old, not new; a fulfilment, not an innovation: and then a brief and simple statement of the actual arrival of the promised Saviour, in the very form and under the very circumstances ascribed to Him by the Scriptures in which they believed.

We can scarcely read this address without thinking of the defence of Stephen. When St Paul heard that address, he was still an infidel and a blasphemer; he had listened to it at the time unmoved; or, if moved by it, only to increased obstinacy in rejecting and maligning the truth: now he is himself the speaker: and must he not have derived some encouragement in bearing his testimony from the thought of that which he had once despised? Might he not say to himself, If I, a person prepossessed and prejudiced in no common degree, a person who even carried bigotry to the length of bloodshed, was at last convinced and converted by the faith which formerly I destroyed; may it not be so with others? May not some of those who hear me be won to-day? May not some, even of those who to-day hear in vain, yet repent themselves hereafter, and *come to the knowledge* and to the acknowledgment *of the truth?*

What could he do better than follow St Stephen's model? He is speaking to Jews: shall he treat them as if their religion was a mere figment of men? as if the Gospel had no connection with it, was not built upon it, did not presuppose, recognize, and spring out of it? Not so. Such a method would be at least as untrue as it would be injudicious. Let a Christian teacher rather seize any elements of good which he may find ready in his audience.

Let him say, if he can, Thus far have ye attained: now follow me onwards. Let him say, Your premises are true: now draw the conclusion. That is just St Paul's language. He says, first of all, *You are not wrong in regarding God as in a peculiar sense your God. I am not going to teach you that Israel had no advantage and no prerogative. The God of this people did, it is quite true, choose our fathers. You have received no vain fable in the record of the Egyptian bondage and the great Exodus. For forty years God in a marvellous way fed and nurtured your fathers in the desert. Yours is a peculiar people. God had it under His charge, in a sense in which He took charge of no other nation. He ruled it, He appointed and He changed its rulers, according to His good pleasure, and for a definite and special end. He cleared Canaan for you: He raised up judges for you: and when at last you would have a king, He found you one; and when for his sins He had removed him, still He chose for you another: and to him He gave testimony; called him a man after His own heart, and promised that of his seed, as concerning the flesh, the Deliverer promised from the beginning should eventually and effectually come.*

God has kept that promise. Of the house and lineage of David He has raised you up a Saviour in the person of Jesus. He gave you notice of Him; a notice near at hand, as well as a notice in the long distance. He sent a prophet before His face, to preach a baptism of repentance, and to tell, in express terms, of One greater than himself who should follow.

Then, as if warmed by his subject, and resolved not to let them miss the glorious offer which he brought them, he proceeds in this strain of direct expostulation.

Brethren, he says, brothers in descent from Abraham, and from Israel; and ye too, who, though not sprung from the root of Jesse, are yet incorporated in the worship and in the ordinances of our people; *to you was the message of this salvation sent forth* from your God. *Be not ye rebellious, like that rebellious house*, of which it must be said, *He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. For they who dwell in Jerusalem, and their*

rulers, ignorant of Him and ignorant also (as to any spiritual understanding) *of the voices of the prophets, which are read,* among them as among you, *every Sabbath day, fulfilled* them *by condemning* Him. Though they knew it not, they were fulfilling by their own act the prophecies of a suffering Messiah. *And though they found* against Him *no cause of death, they* yet *besought Pilate that He might be slain. And when they had thus accomplished all things written concerning Him*—so little had their cruelty availed, that they had at last but fulfilled what had always been written, and unwittingly identified Jesus of Nazareth with the promised Saviour and Redeemer—*they took Him down from the cross, and placed Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from among the dead. And He appeared, for several days, to those who had come up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem;* persons therefore well acquainted with Him, and incapable of being deceived by a mere illusion or semblance of Him ; *who are now His witnesses unto the people.*

And we declare to you, as they to the people of Judæa, *glad tidings as to the promise made unto the fathers, how that God hath fulfilled it to their* (or *our*) *children by raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm*—or, as some read, *in the first Psalm;* for what we call the 1st Psalm was originally a sort of prelude to the whole Book—*My Son art Thou: I have to-day begotten Thee.* The resurrection of Christ is the solemn attestation of His Sonship. *Declared to be the Son of God with power,* St Paul writes to the Romans, *by resurrection from the dead.* And so the same Apostle calls the resurrection of the body the adoption of Christians. *Waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.* The sonship was theirs before : it was Christ's before : but Resurrection sets the seal to it. The 2nd Psalm is one of our Psalms for Easter day. Then first was *God's King set upon His holy hill of Zion,* when God, in raising Him from the dead, had as it were said to Him before men and Angels, *Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee.*

And to show *that He raised Him from among the dead as no longer to return to corruption*—to show, in other words, that *Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more—He hath thus*

spoken in holy Scripture, *I will give to you*, my people, *the sure mercies of David;* or more exactly, *those holy things of David*, those sacred deposits of mine in the hands of David, *which are faithful*, which can be relied upon, which will never pass away, because the word of God Himself is pledged to them. *Wherefore He saith also in another* Psalm, *Thou wilt not give Thy holy One to see corruption.*

Of whom could such words be spoken in their literal strictness? Not surely of a man, that should *die the common death of all men*, and lie for an indefinite period in that grave which is *the end of all the living;* but rather of One whose coming is not after man; who, though He be very Man, is also, no less, very God; and who, though He may be *crucified through weakness* in regard to His humanity, must yet rise again from death in *the power of an endless life. For David, after serving a generation of his own by the counsel of God*—or else, as the words might be rendered, *after having, through a generation of his own, served the counsel of God;* referring, if so, to the words above, *a man after mine own heart, who shall fulfil all my will—fell asleep, and was added unto his fathers*, was laid as an additional member in the burying place of his fathers, *and saw corruption:* his body underwent the common lot of mortality, and passed through every process of dissolution, decomposition, and decay. *But He whom God raised saw not corruption.* The words of David in the 16th Psalm were prophetic words. They not only expressed, as all believing men might express, a sure confidence in the reality of a life beyond death, in which they themselves should hereafter, in God's good time, find a place and an inheritance: they had also a directly prophetic reference to Him that should come; and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ claimed them and justified them as written beforehand of Him.

Be it known therefore to you, brethren, that through this man a dismissal of sins is announced to you; and from all things from which ye could not be justified in (through) a law of Moses, in Him every one who believes is justified. See then lest there come upon you that which is said in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and

wonder, and vanish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will by no means believe, if one should narrate it to you.

So then, my brethren, the discourse which begins with Israel ends with Christ. It may be well to avoid needless offence; well to carry our hearers with us, to accept what they are, and lead them forward to what they should be; but the end is one, and but one: they must be brought to Christ: the Gospel must be set before them as the one, the only hope of fallen, sinful, dying man. Let us look at St Paul's way of preaching Christ; let us look at the Christ whom he preached; and pray God to write upon all our hearts the bright and blessed hope which is bound up in His name.

Through this Man, Jesus Christ, *is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins;* or more exactly, *a dismissal of sins.*

You see what the statement is.

(1) There is the fact of sin. All men, old and young, rich and poor, have sinned. *We have left undone that which we ought to have done; and we have done that which we ought not to have done.* That is sin. Sin is the thing which contradicts God's will and God's command. And sin is a thing which cannot be made not to be. Sin is a fact; a fact true of each one of us: and no regret and no resolution and no effort of ours can make that true fact untrue again. We have sinned. Sin is a fact, and we cannot reverse it.

(2) That fact of sin is not only irreversible, but it also affects us and binds us still. There are many facts, in history for example, which, though true, and therefore unalterable, have no consequences for us. But our own sins are not of this nature. Sin committed still hangs, still adheres, to the sinner. *It shall come* (to use the remarkable phrase of the Psalmist) *into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones.* It becomes as it were a part of him: he cannot divest himself of it. Not only in its infectious character; not only because it is its nature to spread like leaven through all parts of the being, till the whole is leavened by it: but also in its guilt; in the fact that there is upon him, there is incorporated with him, that guilty thing which cannot go unpunished. And

let me add, that Nature, and Providence, and conscience, and the experience of human life, do not, either singly or altogether, give any sure intimation of the probable or possible disseverance of guilt from punishment. There is far more, in each and in all of them, to awaken fear than to inspire hope on this subject. As sin, past sin I mean, still hangs to the sinner, accusing, condemning, prophesying punishment; so, for anything that the voice of Nature in any of its utterances can say to us, we might and we ought to anticipate that its grasp, its binding and clenching power, would be perpetual, would be *without repentance.* I say this, in all truth and in all duty, before I add to the other two particulars—the fact of sin, and the adherence of sin—the third point which St Paul's discourse adds to these, namely,

(3) The forgiveness, or dismissal, of sins through Christ. This announcement is the Gospel. *That which the Law could not do*, that of which Nature could give no hope, that which all else seems rather to contradict than to confirm, yet that without which man must be a debtor and a prisoner and a convict for ever, Christ has done—God has done through Christ—He has forgiven, He has remitted, yea, He has dismissed sins. So that he who was bound is now free. He who was in his sins is now out of them. He to whom sin clung, as a load and a burden too heavy for him to bear, is now, at the sight of Christ's cross, relieved, lightened, disburdened; ready to run the race that is set before him, to enter upon that service which is perfect freedom. How needful, how reasonable, the inference, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.*

The text itself, though earlier in order, yet, in its Christian application, gives the conclusion of the whole matter. It tells us the duty and the end of him who has first known the blessedness which David himself by anticipation described, when he said, *Blessed is he whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.* (1) The duty, and (2) the end.

(1) *He serves his own generation by the will of God.* Or, *In*

his own generation he serves the will of God. The expressions, whichever be adopted, mean the same thing. We may take that of our Authorized Version.

It may seem a humble thing to do: but what else is there for the greatest of us? To serve a generation. We are full perhaps of great projects. We think we can make an impression upon the world. We think that our view of truth, or our way of expressing it, is something original, something novel, something which will affect thought and expression after us. Or we think that the effect produced by our influence, in the things of time or else in the things of eternity, is something which will be permanent: future ages will bless us, and our names will live. I speak the language of the great men of the earth, not as though we ourselves were of them. And it is for the sake of correcting that language. All you can do, the greatest of you, is to serve your own generation. The next generation will have its own ways of thinking and acting. If anything of yours should survive, it will be but to be criticized, disparaged, incorporated and lost in the new. Do not hope to outlive your time. Be satisfied if you can serve your own generation: and when we have put a very narrow construction upon the word *generation;* when we have made it mean only your own town, or your own parish, or perhaps your own family; you must be satisfied still. It is not for the creatures of a day to affect either universality or permanence.

To *serve* your own generation. Not, observe, to lord it over your generation: not, to stamp your mind or your will or your example upon your generation: but to serve it. How humbling, yet how salutary a description! The greater a man is, the more has he to serve. A Sovereign is but a servant. How much more a tradesman, a lawyer, a physician, a clergyman. My brethren, are we setting ourselves to this service? If it is a humble, it is also an honourable, and even a sacred service. To do good to, to help forward, to promote the present and eternal happiness of, the men and the women and the children with whom or amongst whom it has pleased God that we should spend our few days or years on earth. That is the meaning of a generation.

It is, the people living at one time. To serve our generation is to promote the welfare, the best welfare, of the persons who happened to live, or rather, whom God's Providence has appointed to live, at the same time with ourselves below. What a summons is this to every possible work of charity! What a motive does this give to diligence in visiting the poor, in supporting Schools, in trying to set forward every effort and enterprize of good! Let me anxiously bespeak your help and enlist your sympathies.

(2) Then finally, after serving his own generation by the will of God, the forgiven man at last *falls on sleep*. We have dwelt upon this expression in commenting upon the death of Stephen. *When he had said this, he fell asleep.* Sleep is the Christian name for death. Why?

i. Because it is a gentle thing. It has already lost its sting, by reason of the forgiveness of sins. *The sting of death is sin;* and he whose sins have been dismissed is set free also from the fear of death.

ii. Because it is a refreshing and a restoring thing. The weary man wants rest. And the forgiven man, who, in the strength of that forgiveness, has for many years been serving his generation, needs rest: he must *renew his strength* before he enters upon the occupations of *that world;* the world of resurrection and of eternal life.

iii. Lastly, and above all, because it has a waking: because death, to a Christian, is only the gate of life: because, after a pause, he will awake, and *be satisfied, when he awakes, with God's likeness.*

Therefore he who has served his generation according to God's will, when he comes to die, only falls on sleep. He may be laid unto his fathers, and see corruption: that is the common lot of all men; that is the penalty of the universal transgression: but the soul sleeps not; the soul departs to be at once with Christ: and neither shall the body sleep for ever; it too *shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and when it hears shall live.*

Seek forgiveness now. Seek it humbly, seek it earnestly, seek it as the free gift of God. Set yourself, in the faith of that gift,

and in the power of the Holy Spirit who seals it within, to serve your own generation, through the days of your appointed time, by the will of God. Then, when you die, yours shall be a sleep of repose, of refreshment, and unto waking: you shall *enter into peace:* and *if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*

LECTURE X.

THE CONGREGATION AND ITS DISPERSION.

Acts xiii. 43.

Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

We have been reading an address delivered by St Paul, during his first Apostolical journey, at the town of Antioch in Asia Minor. That address occupies a middle place amongst the recorded discourses of the same Apostle. We shall find him, in the next (as also in the 17th) chapter, addressing a heathen audience, to which he could only speak on the basis of reason and Nature. And we shall find him in the 20th chapter addressing a congregation not only of Christians but of Christian ministers, to whom every part of the Gospel was already familiar. Here, on the contrary, he speaks to a Jewish assembly; an audience with whom he might reason from the Old Testament, proving, by a comparison of Scripture with fact, that Jesus was Christ. He has done so. He has connected his teaching with the history of Israel. He has made David his text—the words of David and the promise to David—and has shown those whose glory it was to belong to his race and to his kingdom, that David himself had pointed to Jesus Christ and to His redemption. At last he draws

his conclusion. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.*

The close of the chapter gives us an account of the effects of that address upon those who heard it, upon those who heard of it, and upon the fortunes of the Apostles themselves.

And as they, the Apostles Paul and Barnabas, *were going out* from the synagogue where Paul had thus spoken, *they* (the hearers) *entreated that on the next sabbath these words might be spoken to them.* The contrast drawn in our English Version between the Jews and the Gentiles does not seem to be warranted by the best manuscripts. There was a general wish to hear the subject discussed again. But we are reminded by the words of the next verse, that which has been read to you as the text, that there is sometimes a general wish to hear, without an individual earnestness in following up the things spoken.

And when the synagogue, the congregation there assembled, *was released* from its attendance upon the duty of worship, *many of the Jews, and of the devout proselytes*, those who were Jews not by blood but by religion—we have not yet read of any Gentiles, strictly so called—*followed Paul and Barnabas*, eager to hear more, and to verify by private enquiry the declarations uttered in public: *who* (the two Apostles) *speaking to them*, conversing with them, *urged them to adhere to*, to wait upon, to remain constant to, *the grace* (*favour*) *of God* now made known to them.

And on the next sabbath almost all the city was assembled in the synagogue, *to hear the word of God. And when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and began to contradict the things stated by Paul, blaspheming* (or *reviling*). *And Paul and Barnabas spoke plainly and said, To you it was necessary that the word of God be first spoken: but since you repel it, and judge not yourselves worthy of the eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, I have set Thee*—thus the Father, in the language of the prophet Isaiah, addresses

the Messiah —*for a light of Gentiles, that thou mightest be for salvation as far as the extremity of the earth.* Their own Scriptures warned them that it was the purpose of God to extend the light of salvation beyond any national barriers. The Gospel was designed to be no local or limited religion, the privilege of one nation and of such other persons as might individually join themselves to that nation by obedience to a ceremonial law: it was sent as the religion of all nations, coextensive in its mission with the boundaries of earth itself.

And the Gentiles present in the synagogue, *hearing* the words of the Apostles, *rejoiced, and glorified the word of God*; ascribed to it its true importance and its true dignity as a message from the living God; *and believed*, that is, became believers, by a solemn act of confession and allegiance; *so many*, that is, *as were appointed unto eternal life. And the word of the Lord was carried about through the whole of the region.*

Success, as usual, provoked opposition. Persecution now set in. *But the Jews incited the devout women who were of honourable rank, and the foremost men of the city, and raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their borders. And they shook off the dust of their feet against them*, as a solemn protest against the impiety rather than the cruelty of their conduct, *and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.* So much, and so little, can persecution do. It may put obstacles in the way of progress; but it only stirs into livelier exercise the graces of those who believe.

As many as were ordained (appointed) to eternal life believed. By whom ordained, by whom appointed, to eternal life? Surely there is but One, of whom the words can be written. They belong to the same class of expressions with those of our Lord Himself, *No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him. My Father which gave them me is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine.* There is a great depth here, which cannot be entirely fathomed. This is no doctrine of human

invention, but one which lies at the bottom of Divine Revelation. It is one of those *secret things* which *belong* wholly *to the Lord our God;* except so far as it is needed by each one of us, and therefore recognized in Holy Scripture, for the correction of human pride and the awakening of human earnestness. Every man who is saved will have to confess that there was something at work for him before his own free will. He could no more have taken the first step than he could have taken the last step without God. It was of God that he sought God. It was of God that that first spark of desire within was kindled which made him even a seeker of eternal life. Yes, my brethren, the true Christian knows this well. If God had not had a purpose of love towards him, he had never been able to rejoice in His love. All good in man is of God; as much the first stirring of good, as its latest or its largest exercise. This is that truth, that needful, that man-humbling, that God-exalting truth, which the text recognizes. *That no flesh should glory in His presence.* None can say, I made up my mind to be saved, and therefore I set out, of myself, from that city of destruction which is self, which is sin, which is hell below. God was at work before me, and shall be at work after me. This is that doctrine which brings a man to his knees. Yes, which says to each one of us, If you would be saved, you must ask God to save you. If you are not yet saved, it is because you have not put yourself into God's hands for salvation. It is He who gives the first impulse, and they who read the Word or hear Sermons in the expectation that the act itself will benefit are leaving God out of His own work, which none can do and live. *No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him:* then let us ask for that drawing. Depend upon it, we are building upon the sand, except so far as we recognize God's will and God's work in the matter of our own salvation. To wait idly till God draws is folly, is madness, is blasphemy: but to pray for God's drawing is reason, is obedience, is man's place, man's comfort, and man's one hope. *As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.* God grant that this brief hint be not lost upon us.

When the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and

religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. I would propose this to you, my brethren, this evening, as your test, as your model, and as your encouragement.

1. Now, first, there is a *congregation* before us. It is a wonderful thing, when we reflect upon it; a congregation of worshippers. It differs from every other gathering of human beings, in some important particulars. It is a mixed assemblage. Persons of all ages and of all ranks are here. Persons who meet nowhere else meet here. Persons, alas, who have a grudge against one another, who would avoid one another, who would pass one another by, or speak only to dispute, elsewhere, meet here, and meet without discord. Old and young, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, glad and sorrowful, all are mingled here. The house of mourning and the house of feasting alike contribute their quota to this one gathering. The more you think of it, the more remarkable the scene becomes. In this one place, there is silence, except from certain authorized speakers, or at certain prescribed points in the proceedings. To the words of a man, one of themselves in nature and in infirmity, all are bound, if they come here, to listen in respectful silence. The first inference which all must draw from such a scene—and it is a scene to be witnessed this day in thousands of thousands of places on this earth's surface—must be, that there is a consciousness in man's heart of a great universal want; and that want is the knowledge of God, communion with God, directions from God how to live here so that an immortal life beyond may be a life of happiness and not of woe. To that want every congregation bears witness. The poorer and the less attractive the service, the louder and not the fainter becomes the voice of that testimony. Men cannot do without a religion, and that religion must have its exercises. Man must worship; as a form, if not otherwise: yet, if as a form, because there is a deep want within which must at least be glossed over, at least lulled, at least pacified, if it cannot be met and comforted and satisfied.

Now therefore let us accept, at least thus far, the witness of the congregation. It is a remarkable thing, this meeting. It

could scarcely be accounted for—this habit, so inveterate, so widely spread, of meeting together for worship—except on the supposition that there is a God, whom to reverence is man's first duty, whom to know is eternal life. And this one supposition condemns us. We do not (it may be) know God, and we do not —alas, it is too probable—in heart and life reverence God. What the congregation does, the individual does not. The want is in him as in them: but it is there as a want neglected, it is not there as a want satisfied.

We may well form a high estimate—we cannot form too high an estimate—of this great institution, which is also the expression of an instinct, of assembling ourselves together in a house of worship. What is done here tells upon the life; yes, upon the eternal life. What is learned here, what is confessed here, what is asked here, what is impressed here, ought to have consequences; nay, it has consequences, whether we will or no. Carelessness of thought here, idleness of attention here, the entrance of the world and the devil into the heart here, still more the habit of irreverence and of open trifling here, does tell, does bear fruit, does involve consequences, of which none can set the limit or predict the end. When we *come together*, as St Paul says, *in one place*, it must be either *for the better*, or *for the worse*. O, it is not the listening to music, and it is not the criticizing a Sermon, that will answer the purposes or fulfil the responsibilities of this gathering. It is a serious work, this meeting in the congregation: a work in which Angels take an interest, and in which, we can well believe, the spirits of evil are busy with their wiles and with their seductions.

2. But the text speaks of the *breaking up* of the congregation. *When the congregation was broken up.* He who watches from this pulpit the dispersion of the congregation; sees the gradual emptying of this holy place after the words of final benediction, and pictures to himself, ever so roughly, the various scenes to which the worshippers are returning; may well look after them anxiously, and wonder in himself where and how the seed sown is to have its developement; in how many it will be caught away before it has taken root; in how many it will find a shallow and therefore

but a temporary resting-place; in how many it will be choked, as it grows, by cares and pleasures; in how many—God grant it be in some—it will healthfully spring and grow, and bear its harvest whether it be of the thirty, the sixty, or the hundredfold. When the congregation is broken up this evening, whither will the All-seeing eye track its dispersion? Shall there be any deed of darkness done this night by one who is now sitting before me to hear the word of God? Shall there be this evening around any (that should be a Christian) hearth thoughts of unkindness, or words of dispute and bitterness, to mar the sacred calm of a blessed English Sunday? Or shall there be this night any lying down to sleep unblessed by prayer and thanksgiving, any last thoughts unfit for the Spirit's presence, or any meditations upon the bed in the night-watches such as cannot be *acceptable in the sight of God our Strength and our Redeemer?* Surely, if the sight of a congregation has its solemnity, the sight of its dispersion is more solemn and more anxious still. *Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils:* alas, are there none who do hold in unholy combination the form of God's service with the reality of a service most inconsistent and most opposite?

In the case here before us, an Apostle had been the preacher; the topic of the Sermon was a new Gospel; and the impression made had been such that the audience would fain bespeak the same Sermon for their next Sabbath gathering. And yet even when Paul preached, even when One greater than Paul preached, the words were still again and again verified, *Some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.* It was so then, even as it is now, with the Gospel. When the congregation was broken up, many—but not all—of the worshippers followed Paul and Barnabas to receive a fuller light and a more profound impression. The test of the individual effect was the individual following. Those who were satisfied with the hearing went away when the congregation was dismissed: those who desired to live by it stayed behind and sought a closer converse with the speaker. Is there nothing now to correspond with this distinction? On a Sunday evening, when no special attraction of weather or spectacle

draws another way, this Church is largely filled with worshippers: the word spoken is received reverently, and the appearance of many a listener is that of one *almost persuaded to be a Christian.* The preacher is encouraged to hope *things that accompany salvation,* and the casual observer draws a favourable inference as to the state of religion in this parish and in this town. But apply the test here presented. How many of the congregation stay to follow up the impression? On Sunday morning, still more on Sunday afternoon, yet more still at our week-day Service, the Church is little frequented: the farm and the merchandise, the pleasures of home or the pleasures of society, are found, as of old, sufficient reasons for declining the invitation of the Gospel: this one Service, bright with cheerful light, and varied with beautiful music, is the whole of the religion, to judge by its visible signs, of many of those who now listen. Where amongst us are the *religious proselytes* who *follow* the ministers *when the congregation is broken up;* use, in other words, the opportunities afforded them for a more private and personal instruction, link together the Sunday services by a chain of holy effort and assiduous devotion in the week between, and thus set themselves with all earnestness to grow in knowledge, to grow in seriousness, and to grow in grace?

Paul and Barnabas felt that an attentive congregation, though a great blessing, is an ambiguous sign. They knew the precariousness, as well as the importance, of the spiritual life, and never rested satisfied with one symptom or one evidence of a serious and strong impression. They spoke to these new disciples, and *persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.* It is a great thing to set out well: it is more to run well: it is more still to end well; to reach the goal of the race, and to grasp the promised crown. We are all reminded from time to time of this anxious difference. A hundred and fifty, it may be, of our young Parishioners have devoted themselves in one body to God in the vow of Confirmation: a large proportion of that number have followed the promise to its natural sequel in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: but how many of these, we ask and we cannot

answer, will be found willing to obey the call addressed to them afterwards, from time to time, to gather together for further instruction in the Word and ordinances of the Gospel, so that they may carry on the work begun, and fulfil the covenant entered into between them and God?

Alas, my friends, it is easier to promise than to perform; easier to make one effort than many; easier to dedicate ourselves once at the Lord's Table, than to carry on to its completion the vow thus registered in heaven. Some who knelt at those altar-rails a month ago in seeming earnestness may have defiled themselves already with the world or with the flesh; and, when we would persuade them to continue in the grace of God, will reply to us, whether in sorrow or in indifference, that they never really cared for it; that they have already *gone back* and are *walking no more with Jesus*. These are among the discouragements of the Christian ministry: but the Christian minister who knows himself confesses that he can understand it and marvels not.

May God grant to us who are here assembled His great, His crowning grace of perseverance. Well do we all know, the youngest of us, the snares which are spread on this side and on that for unwary steps. Lusts of the flesh—lures of the world—wiles of the devil—it needs more than one renunciation to overcome all or any one of these. In some new guise, in some unexpected or unsuspected form, each one reappears, lies to us, and bids us run the risk, if it be even to sin and die. Where is he whose armour is proof at all points; who can both discern the real enemy in the professed friend, and also set him at defiance in the strength of One before whom he once fled and for ever trembles? Let us urge you, and more especially our younger companions in the race of eternal life, to *continue in the grace of God;* to adhere tenaciously to every habit of good once formed; to prayer public and private, to the study of God's Word, to self-examination, to Holy Communion; that so you may not only set out rightly but also end successfully. Let us not turn aside from any ordinance or from any pledge by which we may bind our unstable souls more securely to the Lord. Let us look upon all these things

as helps to good. And may He, by whose grace alone any one of us can *endure to the end*, by whose appointment and ordinance alone any of us can attain eternal life, so bless and prosper our course that it may also bring us to our goal; so be with us in our pilgrimage, that we may also reach our rest; and enable us *so to pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.*

LECTURE XI.

GOD'S WITNESSES.

Acts xiv. 17.

Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness.

This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. It was thus that the holy Simeon spoke of the Divine Child, whose presentation in the Temple he had lived to witness. And the ministry of our Lord, both personally and by His Apostles, was a perpetual commentary upon that prediction. By men's treatment of Christ they show what manner of spirit they are of. They who love the light come to the light. They who are of the truth receive the truth. They who are of God hear God's words. They who are living in sin, they who are crooked-minded and false-hearted, they who trust in themselves that they are wise or righteous or holy, will not come to Christ that they may have life. The thoughts of men's hearts are revealed by the touchstone of the Gospel.

And the Gospel is a Gospel for all nations, for all times, and for all characters. These two chapters, the 13th and 14th of the Acts of the Apostles, give us specimens of the way in which the Gospel addresses itself to all manner of states and conditions of men. The educated Roman magistrate, and the designing self-interested impostor; the Jewish audience trained in the Scriptures, and the heathen mob grovelling in superstitious idolatries; to each and all the Apostle has his suitable word of

conviction and correction; his appropriate reason for believing, and his effectual demonstration that God is with him and in him of a truth.

Another long journey, of about ninety miles, has brought the two Evangelists (for in this character they were acting) from Antioch to Iconium. The same scene was there enacted again. They first seek out the synagogue, and address themselves to those who need only the developement of truth; those who already possess in the germ that knowledge of which the expansion is the Gospel. *Christ the end of the Law* is the text for these. And persuasively was it handled. A great multitude believed. But here, as before, persecution followed upon success. The bitterest enemy of the Gospel was still the Jew. The Gentile outcast knew his blindness, and was thankful for healing: the Jew could *say, I see; and therefore his sin remained.*

For a long time the Apostles stood their ground. *The Lord bore testimony to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.* The whole city entered, on the one side or the other, into the great question. Men could not then sleep upon the Gospel. It came into a town as a fire; a fire to blaze and to roar, or else to cheer and to illuminate.

At last a decisive moment came. Jews and Gentiles, headed (to their shame) by the magistrates of the place, made a positive assault upon the Apostles *to use them despitefully and to stone them.* This was their signal. *When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another.* They took refuge from the storm in the smaller and ruder towns of the neighbouring district. *And there they preached the Gospel.* The Christian is to be bold, but not foolhardy. If actual violence is threatened, he ought, if he can, to carry his word where it is yet unknown.

The site of Lystra is not ascertained. Possibly, like that of the Pisidian Antioch in recent years, it may be disclosed to the patient search of some Christian traveller. But the name of Lystra, and one little chapter of its history—the most important, in God's sight, of all—this is known to us, and we are to revive the recollection to-night.

There was a man in the town of Lystra who had been afflicted from his birth. He was a cripple, and had never walked. On one occasion when Paul was preaching Jesus in the street or market-place—for it does not appear that Lystra had a synagogue—this poor lame man sat full in his view. He attracted the eye of the Apostle, who discerned in him not attention only, but interest too in the things spoken, and that spirit of faith also without which there is no place for healing. Suddenly, and with the voice raised to a tone of authority and of command, Paul addressed himself to this poor and pitiable object, saying to him who had never known the power of motion, *Stand upon thy feet upright.* To the astonishment of every spectator—most of all, doubtless, to his own—the strength to obey was given in the effort. *He leaped up, and walked.* The effect upon the population was magical. Uneducated and uncivilized countrymen, incapable of abstract reasoning, and fast bound by the chains of a degrading superstition, they could yet understand and appreciate a fact: they could see that a miracle is an intervention, that it bespeaks a presence, and that it has an end: and in their own ignorant way they proceeded to argue from it. *The gods*, they said, *are come down to us in the likeness of men.* Such visits from their deities were events celebrated in their mythology: Jupiter, the chief of the heavenly powers, and Mercury, the attendant and messenger of the gods, were said, in the tales of the country, to have travelled before through that region: and they lost no time in appropriating one of these names to each of the two Apostles. Mercury was the god of eloquence, and Paul was the chief speaker; therefore he must be Mercury, and then Barnabas Jupiter. Next, these supposed deities must be received with divine honours. It appears that there was a statue, or rather temple, of Jupiter *before their city;* outside its chief gate, as the patron and protector of its fortunes. And this temple had its priest: so, when the rumour of a divine visit spread though the city, it was the business of the priest of Jupiter to receive his patron with due reverence; and he brought animals for sacrifice, and garlands to decorate the

victims, to the gate (probably) of the house to which the Apostles had retired, and prepared to *do sacrifice with the people.* The sound of these proceedings at last penetrated within: and the two Apostles, rending their clothes in horror at the frightful impiety, rushed out among the people, loudly protesting and remonstrating against the idolatry of which they were the objects. In few and vigorous words, they plied the heathen crowd with arguments drawn entirely from what is called natural religion. Anything else would have been unintelligible. To speak of Jesus and the resurrection at that moment would indeed have been a *casting of pearls before swine.* There is no wisdom in flinging the Gospel headlong before minds and hearts incapable of it. A man who has brought oxen and garlands to do sacrifice to a fellow-man must be reproved out of the book of nature, must be turned inward upon his reason, must be brought face to face with conscience, and not presented with an atonement which he will despise, or a Saviour whom he will tread underfoot. Listen then to an Apostle preaching to the idolaters of Lystra.

Sirs, he said, *why do ye these things? we also are men,* human beings, *in like case,* of like nature and infirmities, *with you; preaching to you*—properly, *evangelizing you,* that is, bringing you glad tidings—*that ye turn from these vain things,* from these profitless and senseless idolatries, *to a living God;* to a God, not of wood and stone, and not, like us, of mortal dying mould, but to Him who lives and who gives life, the immortal, eternal, self-existent God; *who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all things that are in them; who in the past generations permitted all the nations to walk in their own ways;* interposed not by any visible judgment, or by any world-wide revelation, to put a stop to human error and to human wickedness: *and yet,* though I thus speak, as if God had suffered man to walk unwarned or unpunished in his own evil ways, *He left not Himself without witness, doing good* to the creatures of His hand, *giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness.*

And by these sayings they with difficulty stopped the multitudes

from sacrificing to them. The scene will soon change: with them, as with their Master before them, it was but *Hosanna now, to-morrow Crucify:* but for to-night we will leave them in this momentary lull of suffering, while we think of their words as here recorded, and see whether there is anything for a Christian audience to learn from that elementary view of truth which the text itself presents to us. Whosoever he be to whom the Word of God comes; however little he may know, however little he may believe; whatever be his past history, whatever his present standing-place before God or man; the words are of unquestionable truth, and the words are of incomparable importance, which say to him, as they once said on an Apostle's lips to the idolaters of Lystra,

Nevertheless, even to you, *God has not left Himself without witness.*

It has been perhaps too much the fashion to leave out this topic from our Christian teaching. The Christian minister's business, I know—his one business—is, to preach Christ. He has no right to stand where I stand to-night, except in some true sense he bear Christ's commission. But is he therefore bound, has he therefore any right, to narrow his teaching to some one or two alone of all Christ's doctrines? I do not find our Lord Himself, and I do not find our Lord's Apostles after Him, refusing the topics of what is called (more or less correctly) the religion of Nature. And let me say, there are men who listen unmoved to the persuasions of the Gospel strictly so called, who will yet tremble (like Felix) when a man *reasons* with them *of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come.* These things are the avenues of the Gospel. Less than saving if they stop there, they are yet salutary, and the way to saving.

God has not left Himself, St Paul says, without witness. Even to a heathen man, without or before revelation, God gave witness, gave evidence, gave proof, of His own being, and of His own character. It is an old topic, but not therefore done with. The same commandment, St John says, may be both old and

new; old in date, and new in power; old in communication, and new in conviction. May it be so now, and with us.

1. St Paul says very distinctly that Nature is God's witness. *The invisible things of God*, he writes to the Romans, *from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they* who despise or deny Him *are without excuse.* Men may argue themselves out of anything: and so they may argue themselves out of the belief that this fair world, with its bright lights and its fruitful seasons, its ordinances of day and night, of life given and life replenished, is a proof of a personal Creator: they may say, and with some logical plausibility, that the old argument, inferring a Designer from a design, proceeds in a vicious circle: they may enthrone chance in God's seat, or invest nature with God's attributes, or profess to leave all in doubt, and with a misplaced and spurious humility pretend that they have not the faculty for such research; that they can detect the fallacies of Theism, but are incompetent to replace falsehood by truth: these things may be, for they have been; and such reasonings are as attractive to the self-complacent, as they are distasteful and distressing to the humble-minded. But we believe that, however difficult to frame into an exact order of premises and conclusions, there is a truth, and an irresistible truth, in the evidence of the things that are seen to the being of an invisible Creator: we can heartily echo the wise saying, *Nature could no more have made me, than Fashion could have made the coat I wear:* we can still look up to the starry sky, and say, It must have had a Maker; we can contemplate the mechanism of a human body, or reflect upon the endowments of a human mind, and say, That wonderful, that fearful existence, is not self-constituted nor self-endowed; it owes its structure and it owes its origin to something, to some One, out of itself; and to that something, to that some One, I give, because I cannot help it, the reverence and the fear and the worship of the thing made to Him who made it.

2. And Providence too is God's witness. There can be no

question on which side Providence is, in the great question between sin and righteousness. We can say with perfect confidence to any young man whose course in life is still undecided for good or evil, There is no doubt that that power, whatever it be, which presides over the course of the world and of human life, is a power which loves righteousness and hates iniquity. If you live morally and religiously, you will live, on the whole, happily; if you live carelessly and immorally, you will infallibly, in the long run, be miserable. Act as if there were no God, or no righteous God, or no Omniscient, or no Almighty God; and though you may not believe that He has anything to do with the matter—though you may ascribe results to accident, to misfortune, to fate, or what you will—those results will most certainly be all against you: you will live to curse the day when you first gave way to temptation, you will live to call (by contrast at least) righteousness happiness and religion peace. Such an experience—uniform, I believe, in its main features, in human life—is a witness of inestimable power on the side of God. Somehow or other, trace it to what cause we will, human life is so ordered that in the long run it is well with the righteous and ill with the wicked. Sin, in a wonderful manner, finds us out. Great crimes bring even the vengeance of society after them: secret sins destroy health, undermine success, cause perpetual terror, and seldom fail, in the end, to entail disgrace: even little sins, even neglected faults, even omitted duties, make conscience a tormentor, and introduce an element of discord and disquietness into the whole fabric of being. Could we wish for a surer practical demonstration of the personal existence and of the holy character of a Creator and a Governor of the universe?

3. And who shall deny that God, the God of holiness and the God of truth, has a witness also in the human conscience? What is this strange thing within me, which presumes to sit in judgment upon me myself? which undertakes to say to me, *This is the way, walk thou in it;* and, if I walk not in it, goes on to pronounce, yea, to execute, within me a sentence of au-

thoritative condemnation? This thing which is at once I and not I myself; which intimately knows, searchingly scrutinizes, and severely judges, yet which has some one to know and to scrutinize and to judge; this thing which certainly I did not place there, and which however I may disregard and disobey I cannot wholly dethrone; what can I call it but God's witness? It is something which He left within me when I went into the far country; it is something through which He still communicates with me, still censures, still threatens, still punishes: may it not be, may not this thing which I call conscience be designed to inform me, that there shall be one day a *setting of the thrones* and a solemn Advent and Epiphany of the Judge?

We have touched, very summarily, and in what some may call an old-fashioned way, upon those evidences which God brings, even to a natural man—in a measure, even to a heathen man and an idolater—in attestation of His own being and character. We have spoken of Nature, of Providence, and of conscience, as instances and exemplifications of the saying of the text, in which St Paul declared to his rude audience at Lystra, who knew not the Scriptures, and had never heard the holy names of Christ and of the Spirit, that nevertheless God had not left Himself, even to them, without witness. These elementary evidences are sometimes too much left out or slurred over in our modern teaching. And they lie under all that is more distinctively Christian. It is only a man with a conscience, to whom Christ can call. It is only a man whom Nature has instructed and Providence has disciplined, who can feel the mercy of a Gospel or see any beauty in a Saviour that he should desire Him. My brethren, have we all learned these elementary lessons? For these also, like the Gospel, may be set aside; may be first disregarded and at last denied. And then, with them, goes all else; all living sense of responsibility, all godly fear, all quickening and sustaining hope. I address some to-night who have perhaps dabbled in infidelity; have touched at least with their first lips the sorcerer's cup, and thought it a manly or an enlightened thing to doubt whether

they had a Maker and whether they shall have a Judge. It is a great point gained if they can be brought to see that what they have accounted their glory is indeed their shame. A man who deifies Nature, a man who believes in chance, a man who is blind to Providence and deaf to conscience, is sunk, by his own admission, not only below the least and most despised in the kingdom of heaven, but below the very idolaters of Lystra, to whom (whatever else He might have withheld) God had at least not left Himself without witness.

4. Nor has God, my beloved brethren, left Himself without witness to you. If you cannot read the countenance of heaven and earth, and infer from the things that are seen the power and glory of the Creator; at least, I am persuaded, you can, in your better moments, see that there has been a hand over your life inward and outward; you can, in adversity if not in prosperity, in sickness if not in health, hear a voice within saying to you, There is an eternity beyond, and eternity must be entered through a judgment. These things, if nothing higher, are God's evidences to you. There has been a hand over you, whatever there may have been in Nature or in the world. Yes, there has been a thought for you, and a care for you, and a guidance for you, altogether out of and perhaps in spite of yourselves. You did not bring yourselves into being, nor can you preserve for one day, by any choice or any providence of your own, the very spark and seed of life. And as the gift, and as the continuance, of being, so also the things which have befallen you; sickness and health, sorrow and joy, failure and success, danger and deliverance, neglect and love; have been rather ordered for you than chosen by you. And not only so; but something within tells you, I am persuaded, how tenderly and how forbearingly you have been dealt with; that you have not been forgotten in trouble, nor let alone in sin, nor rewarded entirely according to your wickednesses; the lot assigned you has been even more medicinal than penal, and yet more evidently considerate and personal than either. These things your better self confesses to you; and the experience of life has been to you God's witness.

To the testimony of nature, and the testimony of Providence, and the testimony of conscience, we add confidently in the last place the testimony of experience.

He left not Himself without witness. Witness to what? We have said, To His own being, and to His own character. To the fact that there is a God, and that He is this and not that; a God of truth, not of falsehood; a God of holiness, not of evil; a God of love, not of hatred. You remember how often these words close a paragraph of the Old Testament prophecies; *And ye shall know that I am the Lord.* Sometimes they end a prediction of judgment; more often still perhaps a prediction of restoring and reviving mercy: but, in either case, this is the end of God's dealings, as there described, with His nation or with His world, *Ye shall know that I am the Lord.* Even so it is with those evidences of which we have to-night spoken. They are evidences of God Himself. They are to make God known to man. And for what purpose? As a point of theory or of doctrine? as though men were debating concerning the origin of Creation, and a decision was to be given to the question by a sign from above? As a display of Divine greatness, for the manifestation of Him, to end with itself, as possessed of attributes altogether inalienable and incommunicable to man? Not so, my brethren: but for this rather; for this end, which is worthy of God; for this end, which is wholly beneficent as well as magnificent in its working; *This is life eternal, that they might know Thee: That by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* This knowledge can be communicated only through Jesus Christ; only by the Holy Spirit of God working in man's heart as the Spirit of the Eternal Father and of the Eternal Son. But there are preliminaries and postulates to this knowledge: there is a vestibule as well as a shrine to the heavenly temple; and its first approach is through the gate of faith in a personal Creator, an individual Preserver, and an all-just Judge. Thus far might a heathen penetrate; let us see that we lag not behind him in the race

of truth. And when we reach that first outwork of the holy precincts, and stand there in full view of the unapproachable glory, trembling in the conviction of guilt, and confessing the equity of an expected condemnation; then it is that there comes forth to us from the heavenly portal One like unto the Son of Man, One made in all things *like as we are, yet without sin;* holds forth to us the sceptre of mercy, and bids us enter and fear not; saying to each one as he draws nigh in the full assurance of faith, *Son, thy sins are forgiven thee: By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved: He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.*

LECTURE XII.

THE REPORT OF THE MISSION.

ACTS XIV. 27.

They rehearsed all that God had done with them.

NEVER continueth in one stay is as much the description of human nature as of human life. There is but One *in whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.* There is but One *the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.* Fluctuation, vacillation, alternation, oscillation, these are the proper terms of superscription for the character as much as for the fortunes of frail, fallible, fallen man. He who was yesterday worshipping may to-morrow be blaspheming. *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.* He who was yesterday praising, extolling, deifying the messenger of the Gospel, may to-morrow be disparaging, reviling, persecuting him. It was so in the life of Jesus: and *the disciple is not greater than his Lord.* Alas, it is too much so even in the Christian's history. This *infection of nature*, by which nothing human is constant, *doth remain, yea, even in the regenerate.* A man who was to-day half in heaven may be to-morrow the victim, the prey, the very sport, of sin. Let the thought convict, humble, abase us, according to our need.

The inhabitants of Lystra, headed by the priest of Jupiter, had brought oxen and garlands to the gate of the house in which Paul and Barnabas were resting. A wonderful work of healing had created what is now called a sensation in that rude city.

Divine honours were the least that could be given to beings thus omnipotent. These two men must be gods in disguise. It was at this moment of popular excitement, terrible far more than flattering for the Evangelists of a pure and spiritual religion, that the address on which we dwelt last Sunday was delivered. Appealing to nothing more than a heathen and almost a barbarian could appreciate, St Paul spoke of a God of creation, who, though He might not constrain man's will, yet desired and deserved man's reverence, and had taken care not to leave Himself (in the darkest times) without a witness in human life and in the human conscience. In nature, in providence, and in conscience—nay, even in the experience of the individual progress through the wilderness of life to the dark river which bounds without terminating it—God has a witness, and no silent or doubtful one, in the heart of every child of man. The witness may be disregarded, may be gagged, at last may be choked and stifled, in any careless, obstinate, and at last obdurate bosom: but there it is: amidst its remonstrances, or over its remains, man rushes on to the commission of that sin, the end and the wages of which is death.

The calm appeal to that inner witness had its effect at Lystra, and will have its effect, amidst heathens or Christians, wherever it is firmly and gravely made. The act of idolatry was prevented: *scarcely*, with difficulty, yet prevented. The oxen were led back from the house-gates, reserved for another occasion and another object. And now a new influence begins to work. *There came in some Jews from Antioch and Iconium*—perhaps on purpose to counteract and malign the Gospel; in that spirit of religious bigotry which at last makes persecution a profession, and leads men to spend precious time and undertake long journeys in quest of objects of violence and cruelty—*and having persuaded the multitudes*, proverbially fickle and treacherous in that region, *and having stoned Paul*, in some tumultuous manner in one of the streets or open places within the town, *dragged him out of the city, thinking that he was dead. Once was I stoned*, he says of himself in his 2nd Epistle to the

Corinthians, referring to this occasion. He who in earlier days had assisted at St Stephen's martyrdom, abetting that murderous hail of missiles under which he gave his life for Jesus, was now himself the sufferer, and (strange to say) in the same cause. Stephen *fell asleep* under that violence. But Paul had work yet to do for his Master; and therefore, though his assailants thought him dead, and so left him, nevertheless *when the disciples had circled him round,* with words of tenderness, and efforts (no doubt) to restore animation, *he rose up,* as they looked on, *and entered into the city.* He who had been dragged out as a corpse, reentered as a living man. God had work for him, and therefore God brought him back from the very grave and gate of death. *The life of Jesus* was, in a literal sense, *made manifest in his mortal flesh.* And so, after a night's rest and retirement, observed or unobserved of those who thought they had taken his life, *he went forth on the next day with Barnabas to Derbe.* At that place we read of no special sufferings. The description may seem rather to imply an undisturbed as well as successful labour. *Having evangelized that city*—the tense implies a successful and somewhat complete work of communicating the glad tidings in this new place—*and having made disciples of many, they turned back to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.* Prudence is not cowardice. They had withdrawn for the moment from those places; but they returned thither. In each place they had made disciples: those disciples must be revisited; not left to fight their new fight alone, or find their way unaided into a life of consistency and devotion. They returned therefore to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, *strengthening the souls of the disciples* in each place visited before, *encouraging them to continue in the faith, and* urging *that it must be through many afflictions that we enter* at last *into the kingdom of God.* And while they thus used the opportunity of their personal presence, for exhortations and encouragements which might by God's grace for ever be remembered, the Apostles took care also to provide for that continuous shepherding of the flock, without which even an Apostle's preaching might have but a precarious

and passing hold. *He gave some*, it is written in the Epistle to the Ephesians, as *evangelists*, as the first heralds of the Gospel; *and some* as *pastors and teachers*, to feed the Church of God, and to build it up in all integrity of faith and practice. So we read that Paul and Barnabas, on this second visit to places already evangelized, *elected* (or *appointed*) *for them*, for the new believers, *elders* (or *presbyters*) *congregation by congregation, and* then, *after praying with fastings*, after a solemn farewell service of prayer and fasting, *they committed them to the Lord*, Jesus Christ, *on whom they had believed.* That was the real safeguard. Men might do something for them: Apostles might plant, elders might water, but the Lord alone could either preserve, or give the increase. And so *they passed through Pisidia, and*, bending their steps southward from Antioch, *came into Pamphylia: and* there *having spoken the word in Perga, they came down* (to the sea coast) *to Attalia; and thence sailed back to Antioch* in Syria, *from whence they had been surrendered to the favour* and blessing *of God for the work which they* had now *fulfilled. And having arrived, and gathered the congregation together, they reported all the things which God did with them*—cooperating with them—*and how that He opened*, by their instrumentality, *to the Gentiles a door of faith;* how God had made an opening for the Gentiles to believe. *And they spent no short time with the disciples* at Antioch.

They rehearsed all that God had done with them. This was the first missionary report ever presented. Of late years these rehearsals have been common. Every year at this season meetings are held to receive such reports. And it is well that it should be so; provided that the accounts are truthfully given, and provided that the results be anxiously weighed. But let us observe for our instruction to-night what was the nature of that work as two Apostles wrought and as God did it with them.

1. What was its object?

You all know how ill any work must be done which has

not a definite aim. What would a carpenter's work be, or what would a builder's work be, or what would a lawyer's or a physician's work be, without some end set before it? without having something proposed to it, as the object to be gained by success or lost by failure? If the piece of furniture be properly made, if the house be firmly and commodiously built, if the health be reestablished or if the cause be won, then there has been good work performed, and the toil has not been wasted or thrown away. Now too often, in religious matters, this first condition of good work is left out of sight. A clergyman, as it is said, 'performs duty:' that is, he has gone through the public service, he has prepared and preached his sermon, he has visited the sick, he has inspected the school, &c. But was that his end? was that the object which he proposed to himself? or were these things only so many means to his end? A serious question: a question of life and death as to a clergyman's own state and hope in the sight of God. Far too often we do make these duties ends: if we can perform our duty (as it is sometimes said) creditably, if we read distinctly, if we preach intelligibly, if we have spent so many hours in visiting our parishioners, if we have got through so many cases of sickness in the day or in the week, we are ready to say, I have done my duty; I have gained my end. And so far is this sort of clerical labour better than idleness, that we can almost account it a clear gain if one in whom we are interested has even thus far discharged his office diligently. But who does not see that no amount of labour, thus accomplished, necessarily implies any the slightest sense of the real work of the ministry? Where is the end, in all this? No builder —to resume the former comparison—would satisfy his employer by merely being seen so many hours each day at his work: if nothing came of it, or nothing but crooked walls, leaking roofs, and shapeless windows, it would be no satisfaction to the owner that the tradesman had spent so many days upon his toil, or that health had been sacrificed, or life itself lost, in an undertaking so futile and disappointing. It is even so in things

spiritual. He is not a good workman, or a workman who can look for his wages, who has nothing to show for it but his toil. True, in these matters, unlike the other, man cannot by any skill or any devotion secure his object: God gives, and God withholds; and he who thinks that his own labour or even his own prayer can guarantee success has not yet learned his first lesson in the school of Jesus Christ. But it is one thing to have an object, and another to gain it. Now therefore we would ask again, What was St Paul's object in this or any other Apostolical journey? Could it be more clearly or more forcibly expressed than in his own words at Lystra, *That ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God?* To turn souls—to turn men, in body and soul—to God, to the true God, the real God, the living God—that was his object. Turning, conversion, was and still is the end of the ministry. A clergyman's end is, now as then, to turn men to God. He does not talk of preaching as an end, or of reading prayers in the congregation as an end, or of visiting the sick or of instructing the young as an end: these things, if they are worth anything, are means, not ends: and he who counts himself to have attained because he has been diligent in offering or applying the means of grace, is guilty of the great folly of forgetting the caution which we may read in Scripture, *Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*

My brethren, if this is indeed the meaning of our office, and this its responsibility, and this its risk of mistake and failure, can any exhortation be more needful than that which bids you to remember its object and to aid its work? If its end is, to turn you, you yourselves, living men and living women, to God Himself, yours surely will be the chief loss and the chief misery if it fails! If the workman who has forgotten or missed his aim shall utterly lose his reward, is not that because you, his charge, are in jeopardy, and because the happiness and the safety of your souls is hanging and trembling in the balance? If the minister is condemned, it will be because you, his charge, are not saved.

The end of the ministry is to turn men to God. If God wrought with Paul and Barnabas, it was proved by the result: men were turned to Him.

2. Now can we add anything as to the method of this ministry?

We are struck by its unity; and we are struck also by its variety.

St Paul appears to speak quite differently to the Jews at Antioch and to the idolaters at Lystra. With the one he argues from the Scriptures; with the other only from the book of Nature. And how can it be otherwise, if a man is in earnest? Has a physician one remedy, and but one, for all cases? Does he proceed, without enquiry, to apply one mode of treatment everywhere, and expect the recovery of health—which is his object—to reward such promiscuous, such unreasoning, such headlong efforts? Even so it is with the physician of the soul. His first business is to ascertain where men stand; what men know; what men really believe already; how they have used that knowledge, how they have conducted themselves towards that belief, hitherto: till he knows or can guess something upon these points, he can only employ the *bow at a venture*, a sort of tentative treatment, an *if* and a *peradventure*, less than impressive in its effect, because less than authoritative in its tone. To speak to a man of salvation, when he has never been conscious of danger; to offer a man forgiveness, who has never trembled at sin; is to heal the wound of a corrupt nature slightly, to cover up the mischief instead of extirpating it, to comfort a man in his sins instead of rescuing him from them. Till the people of Lystra knew that there was one God; till they saw that men were not fit objects of worship; till they read in the face of Nature the unity and the majesty and the holiness of a Creator; it was idle to say to them, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* On the other hand, those who already possessed, not the evidence of Nature only, or of Providence, or of reason, or of conscience, but the evidence also of a Divine Revelation; those whose fault it was to count themselves safe because God

had *taught in their streets*, and because they had duly honoured Him with a ritual and a ceremonial worship; must be instructed out of that Revelation itself as to the sinfulness of sin and as to the impotence of nature, as to the need and the promise and the coming of a Saviour, and told, in the language of a messenger from God in whom they believed, *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets.*

More than half the failures of our ministry arise from inappropriate teaching and from inappropriate hearing. There is a man here in the congregation, as there once was when Jesus Himself was the Preacher, possessed by *the spirit of an unclean devil.* He comes hither, drawn perhaps by custom, by the usage of others, and by his own; perhaps by a wish to gloss over his lost state; perhaps by an instinctive longing to lull the disquietude of his soul. This man, like the demoniac to whom I have referred, meets Jesus here. Would that it were with him as with the man in the Gospel; a meeting with Jesus unto contact, unto healing, unto dispossession. But too often it is only a hearing of the sound; a confused buzz of words and names; something about guilt, and something about atonement, and something about the mercy of God, and something about the love of Christ towards the fallen and the sin-laden: and the man goes away as he came: what he has understood he has misapplied; what ought to have been condemning has been encouraging; what ought to have been the conviction of sin has been to him the permission to sin on and not die for it: that is what he carries away: the unclean spirit is still there; soothed, calmed, lulled, like the surfeited snake till its next fit of hunger; and when that fit comes, there is the unclean devil still, still alive, still awake, still omnipotent over the impulses of the mind and over the members of the body. That man ought to have been told of God in conscience, before he was told of God in redemption, of God in grace, and of God in compassion and in exhaustless love. He ought to have been told of a God *not left without*

witness even in him; a God whose *wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness;* a God who *hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness.* Till he knows and feels these things, till he has trembled at judgment to come, till he has cried out against himself as a poor condemned slave tied and bound with a chain which is dragging him to ruin, he can scarcely profit, he may even be fatally injured, by the offer of a pardon which he wants not, or of a Saviour whom he will only crucify afresh.

What cannot be done by the preacher—for he is here to proclaim Christ and salvation; he must tell of pardon; *woe is unto him if he preach not the Gospel*—must be done for himself by the individual hearer. Let a man ask himself, Is that word for me? Does that suit my case? Have I any right to take to myself that comfort? Are my sins so grievous to me that it is life from the dead to hear of a free forgiveness? Let me take heed: would not that promise, in my dead state, be poison, not medicine? Do not I rather need the Law than the Gospel? Do not I require to be shaken in my sleep, if so be I may escape, with life in my hand, from the devouring flame? God give me the spirit of wisdom in hearing, lest *that which should be for my health be to me the occasion of falling.*

3. Two brief words remain.

The work which God *did with* the two Apostles had, as we have seen, a definite end, and had, as we have seen, a various though consistent method. It had also a careful regard to the carrying on of that which was well begun, both (1) in the form of regular supervision, and (2) in that of well-instructed expectation.

(1) *They ordained elders in every congregation.* It is no mark of enlightenment, but the very contrary, to despise the standing ministry of the Church of Christ. He who is turned to God still needs training. Even he is liable to forgetfulness, to coldness remaining or returning, to ignorance of mind and ignorance of heart, in the things which concern his salvation. It is a comfort to us to be assured that even Apostles recognized this

tendency. It is a comfort to us to believe that our assemblies in this place for worship and for instruction had their counterpart, nay, their origin, in the institutions of the primitive Church. We all want reminding, and we all want quickening, and we all want instructing also, in the way of salvation. It is not the one reception of the one great truth, which will secure us from the risk of falling away, or from the risk of being utterly ill *instructed unto the kingdom of heaven.* My brethren, as we, I trust, feel more and more the responsibility of teaching, so do you, after the example of these early congregations, feel more and more the duty of learning. The minister has to learn; and if he do not learn, if he be not daily a learner in the school of God, his ministry will soon become vapid, soon become a vain repetition, soon become a barren and a wearisome form, both to himself and to those who hear him. Even so is it with the congregation. They too have need to learn in the school of God: and the services of this place are designed to help them in learning. God grant that they may ever be furthered by His blessing, without which *knowledge* only *puffeth up*, and they who are *ever learning* are *never able to come* at last *to the knowledge of the truth.*

(2) Finally, when Paul and Barnabas revisited the places where before they had preached the Gospel, it was to exhort their disciples that it is only through many afflictions that we can enter into the kingdom of God. I have called this, the carrying on of the work of grace in a well-instructed expectation. Neither our Saviour nor His Apostles ever misled men as to the nature of the Christian life below; that it must be a life of conflict, and therefore a life (in some sense) of affliction.

Sometimes outwardly. I address some to-night, whose *foes are they of their own household.* By opposition, by ridicule, by hindrances thrown in the way of worship and of obedience, there is still much which the enemies of truth can do to thwart or even to quench the faith of Christ's little ones. Remember, my brethren who are thus tried, that word *must. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* It is necessary; *it must needs be*—to look no further than this one point—even for

yourselves. A salvation all easy, all smiling, all flowery, all triumphant, would be none at all. It is through trial that faith is brought out strong, clear, and pure, in the day of account. No trial, no salvation: no cross, no crown. Have you not found it so? Do not all these things drive you to God? Do not all these things wean you from earth, and fix your eye on heaven?

But, if all these things were withdrawn, still tribulation would not cease with them. Because *from within, out of the heart,* out of the life which is secret and hidden from all but God—thence, if thence only, proceed trials enough to verify the word here written. What is outward opposition, outward obloquy, outward ridicule, compared with the anguish of an indwelling, an obstinate, an ever reviving and ever struggling lust or sin? Which of us, who has ever known such an enemy, would not purchase its defeat at the price of any wrestling with flesh and blood? Yes, my brethren, it is there, it is in the deep of the heart, that affliction has its home. Who cannot feel with us in that irksome, that miserable, that ever old, ever new distress? Fight on, fight on—brother, sister, in the struggles and in the hopes of the heavenly race—and at last God will give the victory. *Lift up the hands which hang down, and* strengthen *the feeble knees.* Yield not, or you lose the past: yield not, or you forfeit the future. *Yet a little while*—and then, even as it is written, *through many afflictions you shall enter the kingdom.* And

When the shore is won at last,
Who will count the billows past?

LECTURE XIII.

THE FIRST COUNCIL.

ACTS XV. 31.

Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

Lo, I am with you alway. Such was our Lord's parting promise. *It is expedient for you that I go away,* He had said to His disciples; *for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but, if I depart, I will send Him unto you.*

And as for other purposes, so also for this; to guide the disciples into all truth; to give them a right judgment in all things, and to enable them so to steer the holy Ark of the Church through the waves of a troublesome world, that it might faithfully represent its Master's character in the three great features *of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

We are to read to-night of a most important discussion within the Church itself. And though that discussion has now for many ages been settled and laid to rest, so that it is difficult for us even to enter into its great significance, yet we can still admire in these pages the spirit in which Apostles entered into controversy, and the grace which guided them to a right conclusion: we can still learn from their words, and learn from their arguments, and learn from their judgments: we can still gather for ourselves lessons of calmness and moderation and wisdom, and perceive the reality of that Divine presence which prompted and justified the solemn claim here asserted, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.*

For many generations one country had been the sole repository of Divine truth. If any Gentile wished for spiritual light, he could obtain it only by becoming a Jew. We must endeavour to grasp this strange paradox, or we cannot make due allowance for the difficulties presupposed in this chapter. The first idea of the Jewish Christians was that Christianity was only a developed Judaism, and that only through Judaism could any one arrive at Christianity. They could understand a Gentile becoming a Christian, just as they could understand a Gentile becoming a Jew: but no more, and not otherwise. When therefore a large admission of Gentiles into the Christian body was becoming every year a more and more marked feature of the new faith, it was not to be wondered at if, as the first verse of this chapter teaches us, the congregation at Antioch was visited by certain persons from Judea—members, no doubt, of the Christian Church at the head-quarters of Judaism—calling upon the believing Gentiles at Antioch to accept the Law of Moses, ceremonial as well as moral, and saying to them, *Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*

The consequence was a serious dissension; out of which grew the wise and Christian resolution to have the question calmly discussed and decisively settled. Let some representatives of the congregation which had been thus disturbed—and at the head of them those two eminent men whose labours among the Gentiles had been so preeminently blessed—go up to Jerusalem, and there bring the matter to a final issue in the presence and by the judgment of the Apostles themselves.

On their way from Antioch to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas had many opportunities of relating their recent experience of missionary work among Gentile populations. Thus they prepared the way in many Jewish congregations for the reception of that which they felt to be a vital truth. And indeed, my brethren, we can all understand that in that decision which was then pending, the very Gospel itself was at stake. What would have become of Christianity as a religion for the world, if

it had been tied for ever to the ceremonial law, and made a mere offshoot of Judaism? And so it might have been, but for Christ's guiding hand and the Spirit's enlightening presence. It was an open question then. And though Paul and Barnabas on their arrival at Jerusalem were favourably listened to, when they told of the work which God had *done with them* among the Gentiles, yet there were those, at Jerusalem as before at Antioch, who openly maintained that the Gospel could not be severed from the Law, and that those who would be saved by Christ must first be circumcised, and subjected to every precept of the Levitical Dispensation.

It was therefore an anxious moment when *the Apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter*. An earnest and protracted discussion kept the issue long in suspense. We can imagine the feelings of at least one person during this debate. With St Paul this was a struggle of life and death for truth. Once append any condition to the faith of Christ; once say that the work of Christ was incomplete without some addition (it scarcely matters what) of outward observance or of human merit; and the Gospel is made void: a half Saviour is none: a salvation which must be completed by man might as well be a salvation originated by man. Either all is Divine, or nothing. God be praised, even by us of this day, for having given such grace to His holy Apostle St Paul, as to set the Gospel of His Son for ever upon a footing of free grace and of unconditional salvation.

But let us praise God also for this; that, though there may have been a difference of opinion on this question in the Church, there was none among the Apostles; and that, though one Apostle may have had at this time more experience than another of the course of the Gospel among the Gentiles, all the Apostles were enlightened to see that the Gospel was for the world; *a light to lighten the Gentiles*, as well as *the glory of God's people Israel*. Hear what St Peter said on this occasion.

Brethren, ye—the word is emphatic—*ye know that from old*

days God made choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. It was in that same audience at Jerusalem, that St Peter had related and justified his own conduct on the memorable occasion of the conversion of Cornelius. He could appeal now to that occurrence as familiar to the assembly which he addressed. *And the heart-knowing God*—a solemn and searching word—*bare witness to them* as accepted with Him, *by giving them the Holy Spirit, even as to us also* on the great day of Pentecost; *and put no difference between us and them, having purified their hearts by the faith,* by the Gospel received of them in faith. *Now therefore why tempt ye God,* why do ye try experiments, as it were, upon His mercy and forbearance, *to put a yoke*—that is, *by putting a yoke—upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we had strength to bear? But through the grace (free favour) of the Lord Jesus we trust to be saved even as also they.* It is through the free favour of Christ, and not by the help of the Law, that we Jews hope for salvation: the Law will not save us—why put it upon them? A noble testimony! Some presume to speak of St Peter as having had a different Gospel, or a different view of the Gospel, from St Paul: how unjust! Read his Epistles; read this speech in the Council; and say if it be not indeed the same Gospel. Nay, hear his express words at the close of his second Epistle. *Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things.* The indwelling Spirit, as He wrought in the Apostles by His holy inspiration, is one Spirit, not many.

The way thus cleared, it remained for Paul and Barnabas to give publicly, as they had already done in more private converse, the narrative of their own Gentile ministry, and of the testimony which God had borne to it. *Signs and wonders* were not then disparaged as they are now. They were felt as God's testimony: a testimony suitable to the age; withdrawn when unsuitable; but, whether seen or read of, accepted by

the children of wisdom as proofs, reasonable and conclusive, of God's working and of God's presence.

After this plain but unanswerable statement, it needed but one authoritative voice to bring the matter to its right conclusion. There rose one—probably not of the original Twelve, but possessing considerable weight as the president of the Church in Jerusalem, and known in all time as the author of the general Epistle of St James—as if to sum up the arguments, and place the question clearly and finally before its judges. He begins by referring to the address of St Peter. *Symeon* (*Simon*) *related according as* (*gave an account in accordance with the manner in which*) *God first visited* (*interposed*) *to take from among the Gentiles a people for His name;* to *show forth*, that is, *the praises of Him who has* thus *called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.* And then he reminds his audience that this was no more than had been predicted in their own Scriptures. The prophet Amos had spoken of a *rebuilding of the fallen tabernacle of David*, which should have the designed effect of making *the residue of men, all the Gentiles, seek the Lord.* It was never intended that the Jewish election should be final, or the Gentile exclusion perpetual. Through Israel the God of all men would seek and reclaim His wanderers. And this, St James says, is now being fulfilled. What then? Must we so deal with the Gentiles as though they could only find God through Judaism? God forbid. Let us not—such is my judgment—*trouble those who from the Gentiles turn to God;* let us not lay upon them the weight of Israel's Law, or mislead them as to their proper place and footing in the Church of the redeemed: let us only charge them to abstain from such practices as are either morally wrong in themselves, or at all events incompatible with a friendly communion between both sections of the Church. Fornication—a sin lightly regarded among Gentiles—will need to be specially prohibited: there must be no mistake, and therefore no silence, on that matter: it must not be said afterwards that that sin was a thing indifferent: the Gentile Church must receive once for all its law and its

commandment on all questions of moral purity or defilement: and in addition to this, let us enforce also upon them such elementary precepts of a positive nature as are essential to the friendly intermixture, in social gatherings, of the Jewish and Gentile elements within the body of Christ's Church. *Things offered to idols*, though not substantially affected, as materials of common food, by that offering, had better, for the sake of peace, be avoided by the Gentiles. It is well too that they should thus be kept from all approach to those idolatrous rites from which their former life has suffered so cruelly both in its morality and in its worship. When to these we have added the prohibition of blood, and of animals in which (by the nature of their death) the blood remains, we shall have done all that is required for the entire fusion of the two branches of our Christian community. Less than this would not suffice; for the Law of Moses is ever sounding in the synagogues, and with it a perpetual memento of the obligations and prohibitions of Israel.

Thus ended that memorable Council, on the result of which hung the destinies of Christianity. A decree was drawn up in exact accordance with the resolution of St James. It was couched in the form of a circular letter to the Gentile Christians in the districts of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. It rehearsed the occasion of its promulgation; an unsettlement of mind on the ceremonial question, arising from the unauthorized representations of persons belonging to the Church at Jerusalem. Referring its readers for fuller information to the verbal statements of those by whom it was conveyed, Barnabas and Paul, Judas and Silas, it simply enumerated the four special prohibitions suggested in the resolution of St James, and ended by a solemn release from all other ceremonial restrictions whatsoever.

Such was the great charter of the Church's liberties, as finally settled by the mother Church of Jerusalem. Happy had the universal Church been, if a spirit of equal wisdom had always presided in her councils, or a spirit of equal simplicity been everywhere diffused through her congregations.

Had ours been a different audience, we might have dwelt, not without advantage, upon some grave questions of Church government; upon the importance, yet the precariousness, of ecclesiastical assemblies for defining the faith, ordering the worship, or controlling the irregularities in doctrine or practice, of the universal or of any national Church. In this congregation such questions could scarcely be so treated as to promote godly edifying. It is with humbler and more practical questions that we are here concerned.

1. And first of all, as to the subject here under discussion. How grave a question! how different from those matters of ceremony and ritual, or from those abstruse metaphysical niceties in the definition of doctrine, which have too often occupied the deliberations, in later days, of the Church and of its world! Here the enquiry was neither less nor other than this, What must men do to be saved? Is the Gospel of the grace of God all that a man need believe? Was the work of Christ alone, in undertaking our sins and becoming the Mediator and the High Priest of man, all-sufficient, or only partially sufficient, for justification and life? What can be a more solemn or a more engrossing enquiry? The Gentile world, of which we all are members, was waiting as it were around that Apostolical council-chamber, to know, for all time, the terms of eternal life. And God guided His first servants to a true definition; a definition which has been the stay and the solace of ten thousand hearts in every generation from theirs to ours. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*, was the response of that first Council. *We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they. We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings.* O, if the answer had been ought else than this, what a yoke had been laid upon the neck of later ages and distant lands! What a schism would have rent the one body, what a discord would have been introduced into the trumpet's most certain sounds! How would the Church of Paul, and the Church of Apollos, and

the Church of Cephas, and perhaps the self-styled Church of Christ, have had each its own watchword, its own Scriptures of truth, and its own framework of worship! But He who promised to be with His Church alway, was with her on that day, and made her decisions only merciful, only wise, and only true.

2. It follows naturally to ask whether we are holding fast this decree of the Apostles, setting men free from the yoke of the Law, and turning our whole trust to the grace of Christ. I know that none of us is looking to the Levitical Law for justification. But we must not so treat the Holy Scriptures as if the form and the substance, the sign and the thing signified, were wholly and always one. Trust in the Law of Moses is now a thing antiquated and gone by: but not therefore has it become impossible to look off from Christ, or to seek to add something to His one work of atonement and reconciliation. It is not in days of health and prosperity that we can best judge of the groundwork of our eternal hope. So long as life smiles upon us, a mixed and tangled tissue of faith and works, of unchallenged professions and traditional doctrines, is enough to keep off the eye of the soul from detecting the shallowness and the hollowness within. And a dread of morbid self-suspicion, and a right desire rather to do than to feel, and a kind of teaching which deals little with the heart and only superficially and perfunctorily with the life itself, may prevent many well-meaning and well-reputed persons from entering closely into judgment with the plea which they purpose to urge hereafter at the bar of God. Some of those who hear me know already, by painful experience, how different is the confidence of health from the confidence of sickness, the religion of a lifetime from the religion of a deathbed. They have seen earth vanish; they have felt its show fallacious, and its pleasures and riches and ambitions a dream: have they not seen also, in that trying moment, that heaven was less real to them than they had imagined it, and that the loss of one world is by no means necessarily the gaining of the other? These cases, numerous enough in every congregation to be used confidently as warnings, prove to us all the absolute necessity of shaping and defining to

ourselves the personal hope; of being able to make answer to ourselves in life and strength, as we must hereafter make answer in distress and death, as to the way of salvation, and as to the ground of a sinner's hope towards God. It is well that every prayer breathed by any of us in secret should contain in it the deep heart-felt expression of the plea which we intend to present when we stand before the great white throne. Let us put that plea into words, while yet it can be reconsidered, while yet it can be revised, while yet it can, if necessary, be reversed. Yes, my brethren, let us say now in words, when we kneel down to pray, either this or that. Let us say, if that is our true feeling, *O God, I depend, for acceptance with Thee, upon my freedom from gross sins, upon my innocence of any injuries to my neighbour in word or deed, upon the punctuality of my Sunday worship, upon my liberality in relieving others according to my power, upon my general obedience to Thy law, and reverence towards Thy name and word and house. On these things I rely for acquittal and absolution in Thy judgment. On these things; not, of course, without Christ's work, but as making that work available for my individual safety and justification.* The very framing of the words will make us shrink from them, I trust, with abhorrence. But, alas, I have only uttered what thousands say even on their deathbeds. Let them say it now, say it openly, say it in prayer to God; if so be they may learn to repent of it, and to say something better and truer and more Christian. And let others say *this;* say it because it is what they mean and what they feel; say it because it is what they would live by and what they would die upon; *O God, my one hope is in Thy mercy; not in anything that I have or in anything that I am; not in what I have done, or in what I have abstained from doing; not in my good works, or right motives, or pious feelings; not even in my faith, and not even in my repentance; but only in this, that Thou of Thine infinite mercy didst send Thy Son Jesus Christ into the world to bear our sins; that He by His obedience and by His sacrifice did perfectly accomplish the work of human redemption, and that He now and ever liveth to be the Mediator and the High Priest, the Saviour and the Life, of*

all who come unto Thee by Him. For His sake, on His account, because of Him, God be merciful to me a sinner. Few comparatively have this entire simplicity of view, this entire unity of trust, and few therefore know all the peace and all the strength involved in the Divine, the heaven-sent salvation which is in Christ Jesus.

3. And thus, finally, we are brought to a single reflection upon the text itself. *When they had read the decree, they rejoiced for the consolation.* What was there to rejoice in? Where was the consolation in that brief, summary, business-like epistle? There was this. It set the Gentile Christians free to *rejoice in Christ Jesus* without having and without seeking and without wanting any *confidence in the flesh.* It taught them that the Saviour preached to them was a complete Saviour; that, if they could but *confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in their heart that God had raised Him from the dead, they should be saved.* Who now rejoices in that consolation? We rejoice if we hear of an accession of wealth, an increase of honour, or a new spring of pleasure: we rejoice in human esteem, human affection, human love: but which of us can even enter into spiritual joy? which of us really cares for the offer of a free forgiveness, for the assurance that he is complete in Christ, for the *good hope through grace* of holiness here and of heaven hereafter? These things we relegate to a death-bed: we care not to walk now in that heavenly sunshine; we are contented with the dim twilight of reason, if we love not better still the outer darkness of indifference, folly, or sin. *O that there were such a heart in us,* as could be stirred into joy by the consolation of a Gospel! *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*

Purifying their hearts by faith. Faith alone, which is the sight of the invisible Saviour, can really deliver us from that *corruption which is in the world through lust.* God grant it to each one of us. Then will all that is hateful in us become hateful to us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will subdue and conquer it for us. Then shall we indeed love what God

commands, and desire what God promises. Then at last, *among the sundry and manifold changes of the world*—amidst cares and distractions, amidst trials and sorrows, amidst losses and separations, beside the bed of the dying and at the open grave of the departed—*our hearts will there be surely fixed, where true joys are to be found*, and in the revelations of a Saviour's love and a Father's home we shall still be enabled, whatever betide, to *rejoice for the consolation*.

LECTURE XIV.

UNITY IN DISUNION.

ACTS XV. 41.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the Churches.

A BRIEF and at first sight painful passage lies before us this evening. A difference between two Apostles; a contention, and a separation. Nevertheless even here, as in human life everywhere, side by side with sorrow springs up comfort. God's work goes on, and a deep unity lies under all Christian variances, and at last comes that profound calm, in which all shall rest and all be at one for ever.

We have read of the journey of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, for the decision of that great question, *How shall man*, whether Jew or Gentile, *become just with God?* Shall Christ suffice, or shall Christ only assist? Shall we be complete in Christ, or only set by Him in the way to salvation? The answer to these questions was bold and strong. Christ is all. *By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.* A decree was drawn up in this spirit, and its reception in the Church of Antioch was followed by great joy. *When they read the letter, they rejoiced for the consolation.*

For some time Paul and Barnabas resumed the quiet though laborious office of stationary pastors of the Church of Antioch.

But the words of his Divine commission, *Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles*, were still ringing in the ear of Paul, and he began to propose to himself new journeyings in the work of an Apostleship which had the world for its diocese.

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return ow and visit (inspect) the brethren in every city of all those *which we* before *announced the word (message) of the Lord* esus Christ, *how (in what state) they are. And Barnabas wished to take with them also John who was called Mark. But Paul demanded not to take with them him who* in their former journey *withdrew from them from Pamphylia and went not with them to the work. And there arose a provocation (irritation,* or *sharpness), so that they were parted from each other, and Barnabas, taking Mark with him, sailed forth to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas*—or Silvanus; one of the two messengers from the Church at Jerusalem; who, having accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and thus fulfilled his special mission, seems to have remained there in the exercise of his duties as a Christian *prophet—and went forth, surrendered to the grace* and blessing *of the Lord by the brethren* at Antioch. *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening (establishing) the congregations.*

Various thoughts will here suggest themselves.

1. St Paul's proposal to revisit the congregations was a proof of his sense of the precariousness of the Christian life. Throughout his Epistles to the Churches we have the expression of the same spirit. He has scarcely left a place, when his anxiety about the wellbeing of his converts becomes too painful for him to bear. He sends back his only companion, and consents to be entirely solitary in a strange and unfriendly city, if he may but gain the desired tidings as to the stability of those whom he has left behind. It was so already at this early point in his ministry. He says to his former associate in the toils and perils of their common Apostleship, Let us return and inspect our congregations, that we may see how

they are. It is a good thing to extend the field of labour, and preach the Gospel where Christ has not yet been named. It is a good thing to form new plans, originate new machineries, and carry the ministrations of the Church into homes and haunts which they have not yet penetrated. But in all this we must take heed lest we be chargeable with not well following up a work which has been well begun. Whether that work be in a house or in a church, in a sick-room, in a school, or in a congregation, it will not be done by one effort, it may need many efforts before one impression is made; and when that impression is by God's grace secured, still it may fade and flag and at last disappear, if it be not vigorously and earnestly and constantly renewed. Therefore the call, *Let us go again and see how they do*, is the call as much of good sense as of godly zeal. *Let us get up early to the vineyards*, says the inspired Song; *let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth.* We can all admire the ardour with which a burning zeal carries its possessor across seas and deserts *to make one proselyte* to the Gospel. But they who know themselves, who know, in other words, the infirmities of nature and the deficiencies of grace, will respect far more that quiet, unostentatious, plodding steadiness which leads a Christian man or a Christian woman, regardless of discouragement and regardless of dulness, to walk day by day, and week by week, and year by year, the round of some unattractive duty; to be found always at the same place at the same hour, plying over again the task oftentimes defeated, and seeking no reward, either of publicity or of excitement, if but the work once undertaken may be faithfully done, and the promised benediction at last heard, *For my name's sake thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted.* Most of all is this seen in the most directly spiritual ministrations. O how precarious is the work of grace in the most promising of us all! What snares does Satan lay for the young, the newly confirmed, the just awakened, the recently reformed and repentant! Well may it be written by the great Apostle, as a reason why a

kind as well as firm treatment should be used towards the penitent, *Lest Satan get an advantage over us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.* And well may every minister, following however humbly or however distantly in his steps, seek by all means to maintain and strengthen in those committed to him any work of good which he may hope that he sees begun. So soon is the ground once cleared again overgrown; so soon is the impulse once communicated checked and impeded; so soon is the seed once sown snatched away, or scorched in its first budding, or choked finally in its growth; that there is need daily, both with regard to ourselves, and with regard also to those to whom we are set to minister, to say in the words here before us, Let us go again, let us visit, let us examine, let us inspect the work, in that heart or in that house, and see how it does.

2. We pass to the result of the proposal on the occasion here described. Barnabas shared St Paul's feeling: he too was anxious about the congregations: he too was ready to make exertion, and to encounter peril, and, if necessary, to face death, in their service. But in settling the details of the enterprise a grave difference presented itself. Barnabas proposed that his young kinsman, John surnamed Mark, should accompany them on this their second journey. We can imagine many reasons for this suggestion. There was a very natural partiality for his own relation. It would be a comfort to him, on a journey full of discomfort and of privation, to have the society of one bound to him by double ties, of nature and grace; always ready to give the help of a younger man to his elders, and to cheer a difficult work by his sympathy and cooperation. Doubtless also Barnabas would urge the importance of a gentle and forgiving treatment towards one whose religious character was still rather forming than established. He might speak confidently of his kinsman's regret for past lukewarmness, and of his earnest resolutions for the future. He might say, Let us not repel the freewill offer of service, nor quench the reviving flame of grace. We must not, in our admiration for St Paul's

more rigid rule of duty, refuse our sympathy to St Barnabas's natural feeling and more indulgent hopes. In themselves the two arguments may seem almost equal. In the one justice, in the other mercy predominated. In the one the Apostle, in the other the man. In the one the interests of the mission, in the other consideration for the person. If St Paul, so tender towards the infirmities of others, so anxious not to *break the bruised reed*, so fearful of driving repentance into despair, saw here a case in which it was necessary to press a measure of severity, we are inclined to suppose—and the Church of Antioch seems to have considered—that he was in the right: but at least it was a case in which both sides had something of right, and in which a difference of opinion ought not to have run on into a variance of spirit. Yet so it was. The words, *the contention was so sharp between them*, may somewhat exceed the strength of the original expression, which is, *there arose a provocation*, or, as you have already heard, *an irritation* or at most *a sharpness* of feeling, *so that they separated from each other*. But certainly we are designed to see in the statement, however it may be modified, an undue warmth of feeling, and an undue tenacity of opinion, and an undue strength of expression, on both sides; a position in which the man got the better of the Christian, and in which consequently, whichever of the two was most in the right, there were faults more or less equal, on both sides; faults of temper and spirit, faults of feeling and of expression. Both were Christian men, and yet both were in this instance exemplifying the Fall.

The faults of Christian people fill a large page in human history and in human life. Even in Holy Scripture, where is the man exhibited as free from all sin, save indeed One only? One who was not only Man, but God also? It is never concealed from us that the taint of nature *doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerate*. The theory of perfection is not a Scriptural, because it is not a true theory. A Christian is one in whom the Spirit of the living God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, lives and moves and works.

But that Divine influence does not overbear man's will, nor does it destroy man's nature. As long as we are in this world, the natural may have put on, but it is not yet lost in, the spiritual. And yet this is not so true as to palliate human fault, or to reconcile men to their own infirmities. In so far as these infirmities work, a man is not yet renewed; his struggle is not over, because his victory is not yet won.

The narrative before us exhibits human infirmity in its working in the regenerate. Much might be said for Paul's view, and much might be said for Barnabas's view, on the practical point before them: yet both could not be right in their conclusion, and neither could be right in making it a matter of quarrel. Paul and Barnabas were both in training for perfection: neither of them had as yet reached it. Many years later one of them wrote—both would to the end have confessed it—*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.*

But three things I would notice in this history, lest encouragement be given to a state of mind and of life most unchristian.

(1) The first of these is, that the subject of this dissension of Paul and Barnabas was a Christian subject.

They were at variance as to the best way of prosecuting Christ's work. One thought that that work required severity: the other thought that that work was compatible in this instance with indulgence. One thought that a man who had once shown a cold and indifferent spirit towards eternal things, a man who had once *put his hand to the plough*, and then *looked back*, was not fit to be the companion in future of Apostles: the other thought that a man who regretted that indifference, and was willing to repair it by future earnestness, should be invited and encouraged by all the tendernesses of the Gospel. This was the question. It was not, like most variances among Christians now, a dispute which of the two could gain most of the good things of this life. It was not a quarrel arising out of this, that one of the two had gained, what both could

not have, of the riches or honours or pleasures of the world. It was not that one had disparaged the ability or the probity or the spirituality of the other, and that this must awaken in the natural mind a resentment to be shown in retort or cherished in malice. None of these things. It was just a difference of opinion as to the best way of serving Christ; a difference of opinion too warmly expressed, too stoutly maintained, and too far followed into its consequences. Happy should we be, most happy, if our faults were only those of an excess of zeal and an excess of tenacity in reference to the work of Christ and the interests of souls.

(2) In the next place, that infirmity, that error, that fault, of which we have spoken, was redressed in the wisest and best of ways.

It was with the dissension of two Apostles, as with the dispute of two Patriarchs in the earliest times. *Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee; for we be brethren: Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.* Where no divine law compels coexistence, separation is oftentimes the best cure for discord. There is but one relation of life in which severance is sin: in every other, if men cannot agree, let them live apart. It may be a painful necessity; itself a standing witness of the corruption which is in all: but they who cannot do God's work together may for the present do it apart: the world is wide enough; let them *live and let live.* Barnabas will have Mark with him: let it be so. Paul cannot think it right: be it so: let him find another. Difference is not necessarily variance, nor disagreement strife. If two of God's servants cannot see things alike, let them agree to see them differently. If they cannot act together, they can at least believe together, and hope together, and together love. It is thus with conflicting parties and conflicting sects. It is not necessary that they should fight out their differences: let them differ and be at one. If each

has Christ's work and Christ's cause and Christ's glory at heart, they will all be reconciled by the great reconciler: death, which is the gate of heaven, will make *the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.*

(3) And yet once more. In the history now before us we are not left to the great future of all for our hope of reconciliation. Separation was in this case followed—we know it—by concord.

In St Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, written from Ephesus some five or six years later than the event which we are now considering, St Paul speaks of his brother Apostle in terms fully expressive of their substantial unity; a unity not only in the essential doctrine of the Gospel, but also in the details of their ministerial life. And of Mark we have two notices in St Paul's later Epistles; the one written during his first, and the other during his second imprisonment at Rome. *Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas,* is spoken of, in his Epistle to the Colossians, as one of his few *fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God,* who had been *a comfort to him* in his bonds. And in his 2nd Epistle to Timothy, the latest of all his Epistles, these words occur, as though for the purpose of leaving one latest record of this change and reversal of his earlier opinion, *Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.* He, who was once rejected as having departed from the work, is now declared to be profitable for it, and chosen by St Paul himself as the companion of his last sorrows and the witness of his latest testimony. Time is a great healer: and when time is seconded and enforced by an indwelling spirit, in each, of Christian devotion and Christian love, what may it not do for the reconciliation of those whom circumstances have formerly divided in the service of a common Master?

3. And now that history which we have viewed in its bearing upon man, has its aspect also towards the things of God; towards His Word, and towards His Providence.

(1) The Holy Scriptures are no flattering tale. It is no

part of their object to write (in the human sense of the expression) the *lives of saints*. There is no screening, and there is no palliating, of the infirmities of holy men. The sin of Abraham, and the sin of Jacob, and the sin of Moses, and the sin of David, and the sin of Elijah, and the sin of Hezekiah, each is told plainly; told in its full culpability, and told in its bitter consequences. Even thus it is in the New Testament. The denial of Christ by one Apostle, and the mistrust of Christ by another, and the desertion of Christ by all; the dissimulation of one Apostle, and the error of another Apostle, and the dissension and discord of other two Apostles; each is told simply, told naturally, and told without palliation and without excuse. It is taken for granted that truth alone is in view, and that truth implies the recognition of human infirmity and the disclosure of human sin. If men will make mischief of it, they must. If men will say either, *Because a saint did this, therefore it cannot be sin;* or else, *Because such a man did this, therefore he cannot be a saint;* they are left to do so. The business of the Holy Scriptures, in these respects, is with facts, not with inferences. They intend to describe men as men; frailty as frailty, sin as sin, and grace as grace. They are not so much bent upon enabling us to judge decisively upon the character and destiny of the persons whom they delineate, as upon teaching us to hold up the mirror to ourselves, and to see how God judges, and how God punishes, and how alone God forgives and repairs and washes away that sin which is in all of us. And it turns to them for a testimony. That Book which paints not men as either demons or heroes; that Book which tells me just what is true, and teaches me how to rise out of this which is truly the natural man into this which is as truly the Christian man; how to mourn over myself without despairing, and how to deal justly with others and yet not condemn; that I call a true Book: I see there man as he is, and God as He is: I see there a light to my steps, because it describes truly the wilderness which I traverse, and because it shows me how and by what

guidance I can traverse it in safety. And if I see that the Book describes all else truly, because according to my daily experience of man and of man's world, then I can believe it when I see that there is one Person, just one, and one only, whom it paints as indeed *without sin; perfect Man*, as much in the blamelessness of His life, as in the completeness of His nature. It had been easy to represent Paul as perfect, and John as perfect, and Peter as perfect; just as easy in itself as to represent our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself as perfect. To do so, would have thrown a sort of lustre upon the Gospel, as capable of perfecting holiness below, and making *sons of Adam*, by an entire transformation, into *sons of God*. If I see that this is not done; if I see that conversion is not perfected save by a gradual and a growing sanctification; then I can believe that a Book so truthful respecting the Christianity of the Christian is no less truthful in reference to the Divinity of Christ.

(2) Finally, this passage sets before us, not in word but in act, the doctrine and the reality of an all-working and all-ruling and all-restoring Providence of God. Out of evil comes forth good. Out of human infirmity there grows divine strength. The unity of the work is broken. It is sad; it is discouraging. We say, God has forgotten, or He could not permit such a breach in that temple which is to be all holy. We look again, and out of the one divided there has sprung a twofold completeness. The fountain-head is parted into two streams; of which one compasses one region, and one another. Paul and Barnabas set not forth as one. What then? Barnabas has *taken Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus*. There he is to wage Christ's battle against the obscene rites and foul immoralities of the Paphian idolatry; and Christ is glorified in it. And Paul? is he thrown back upon a compulsory idleness or a melancholy isolation? Nay, he too has set forth, and not alone. He has *chosen Silas*, a worthy companion in the work of missions; and, *being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God*, he is *going through the regions of Syria and Cilicia*,

confirming the Churches. And in him too, in him yet more visibly than in the other, Christ is glorified: we shall read the narrative of his triumphs, and admire the hand of Him who vouchsafed them. Thus in the Gospel cause God works, and man is His instrument. If the infirmity of man hinders here, God will find a way there. Happy they, and they only, who in that cause are willing to be *fellow-workers with God.* Fellow-workers, first in receiving, and then in giving: first in giving entrance to the word of life, and then in recommending, adorning, and diffusing it.

He went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the congregations. O for that strengthening hand, that animating voice, amongst us! The light which he carried is ours too: the object is as great, the need as urgent, the argument as powerful, and the means the same. Where then is the difference? Is it not in the devotion of the messenger, and is it not in the simplicity of the hearer? Do we speak, like St Paul, as from God, for God, in God, to God? manifesting in our mortal flesh the life of the risen Jesus? And do we hear as men seeking to be informed, willing to be guided, earnest to be saved? May that grace of God, to which St Paul was recommended, be with us also; touching with its holy fire the lips that speak and the hearts that hear. Then shall the words at last be verified in us, *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

LECTURE XV.

A CRY FOR HELP.

Acts xvi. 9.

Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

The Chapter before us is a Missionary Chapter. It tells us of missionary work, and traces to their source missionary hindrances. It tells of the education of a missionary, and of his character, and of his call. It sets before us the real end proposed to him, and the beneficent nature of the influence to be exercised on those who believe.

Paul and Silas had set forth from Antioch recommended by the Church of Antioch to the grace of God. The primary object of the journey was to revisit the congregations of Asia Minor, already converted and established by the previous ministry of Barnabas and Paul. But we shall see that God designed greater things than these for this journey. Now for the first time the Gospel of His grace was to cross into Europe, and to be brought into contact with new races and a different civilization. But with this we are concerned only by anticipation this evening. We begin with the now familiar names of Asiatic towns. For the second time St Paul enters Derbe, for the third time Lystra; enters with a new companion, but in the power of the selfsame Spirit. At one of these two places—for the sacred narrative says not expressly in which—he finds a certain disciple named Timotheus. If St Paul had a human affection, it was for this

younger friend. It is one of the many links of natural sympathy which bind us to the great Apostle, to observe how earnestly and how faithfully he cherished to the very end of life the tie now formed, addressing to Timotheus the very latest of all those inspired utterances in which he still communicates with the militant Church below.

Timotheus, you observe, was already *a disciple;* that is, a Christian. St Paul always addresses him as *his own son in the faith;* and therefore we must conclude that he was one of those *firstfruits of Asia* which his former missionary journey had gathered. We are introduced, by the joint help of this narrative and of St Paul's later letters, into the family home in which the childhood of Timotheus was nurtured. There is a Jewish and Christian mother—the Epistle supplies the name, Eunice—one who having trained her son carefully from his childhood in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, had herself too, no doubt under St Paul's ministry during his former visit to her city, been led to a humble and earnest faith in a Saviour revealed in the Gospel. The father belonged to a different race: he was *a Greek*, or Gentile; at most a proselyte of the gate, not one of the circumcision: but it may well have been that he too was a believer in Christ, and that thus there was no jar whatever in the unity of a pious and a peaceful home. The group is completed for us in St Paul's 2nd Epistle to Timotheus by the addition of the name and character of a yet older member. *I call to remembrance*, he says, *the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.*

Every saved soul has its history: and that history is doubtless as various in various instances as the features of the human countenance. Some, with every disadvantage of birth and education; neglected, or worse than neglected; led astray by the example of parents or by the influence of bad companions; are yet plucked at last as brands from the burning, and trusted with great commissions in the army of the living God. If we knew all, we should probably find that the noblest and most

courageous of Christ's servants belong to a different class. Nowhere is there found so clean a life, so pure a heart, or so true a devotion, as in those, who, like Timotheus, have grown up from the first in the sanctities of a godly home, *have known from a child the holy Scriptures*, and have seen those Scriptures exemplified in the most unostentatious yet most persuasive form, the faith and piety of two generations. These things do not, of themselves, secure salvation; nor does the want of these advantages, blessed be God, necessarily forfeit it. But where these things are, there (the grace of God being added) faith is more stable, feeling more equable, and obedience more consistent.

The character of this young disciple was attested by the concurrent voice of two (if not three) congregations. Thus, if there was something of human preference in the feeling with which St Paul regarded him, it was at least no foolish fancy; it had a sound basis of conscientious approval, and it had also a more decisive seal in the inward promptings of the Holy Spirit. We read in the same Epistles to which I have so often referred, that there were *prophecies going before upon* him; that is, no doubt, express and authoritative intimations, given to St Paul or others, of the will of the Spirit of God that Timotheus should be set apart and dedicated to the ministry of the Gospel; even as in St Paul's own case there had been a special designation to his first apostolical journey, when *the Holy Ghost said*, by the voice (apparently) of certain of the Christian prophets at Antioch, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

Nor does the parallel end there. As that Divine nomination did not supersede, in the case of Paul and Barnabas, the imposition of human hands—*When they had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them*—so also it was here. *Neglect not*, might St Paul say to Timotheus in the later days of his ministry, *the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.* Those *elders* of whom we read in the 14th chapter as *ordained* by Paul and Barnabas *in every church* of Asia Minor, were employed in this solemn office of Ordination. The Divine reality is attested by the human sign,

and he who has been designated by the choice of God is *sent away* to his work with the blessing and with the commission also of man.

These things we learn from the Epistles. In the history we read only of St Paul's will that Timotheus should accompany them on their mission; and of a preliminary which he deemed necessary in order to his acceptance and usefulness.

With the strong prejudice already existing in Jewish minds against St Paul's supposed disparagement of the Law of Moses, it would have been most unwise—unless absolutely required by truth and by the Gospel—to take with him as his companion one not even incorporated in the Jewish covenant by the ordinance of circumcision. Now, had Timotheus been, like another disciple, Titus, only and altogether a Gentile—a Gentile by both parents—St Paul would doubtless have refused to consent to his being subjected to an ordinance, the only meaning of which, for him, would have been, that, except a man keep the Law of Moses, he could not be saved. We know from the Epistle to the Galatians that that was St Paul's conduct in the case supposed. Titus, *being a Greek*—a Gentile, we may conceive, by both parents—was *not compelled*—St Paul refused to allow him to be compelled—*to be circumcised*. The case of Timotheus was different. He had one Jewish parent. By one side he was of the natural Israel. And St Paul never forbad a Jew to be circumcised. Though no longer necessary, the Law was not for him antichristian. It was optional whether he should be circumcised: the choice must be decided by circumstances. He must not trust in the Law, but he might submit to it. If then his usefulness would be fatally compromised by the exercise of his freedom in favour of his Gentile parentage, it was his duty to use it in favour of the Jewish. *They knew all that his father was a Greek:* they would be suspicious therefore of his preference, under St Paul's tutelage, of Gentilism: it was needful, consequently, if he would be a minister in any sense to Jews, that he should disarm this prejudice. In all this, St Paul was as consistent with himself and with his own practice and principle, as he was tenacious of

his great, his celebrated maxim, *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

One great part of the work of this Mission was the delivery to the congregations of the decree of the Council at Jerusalem, setting free the Gentile Churches from all obligations to Judaism and to circumcision: in other words, publishing throughout the length and breadth of the earth that Jesus Christ is all, that we are *complete in Him*, and that they who are in Him *are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.* The effect of this proclamation of a free and unlimited Gospel was what it had been elsewhere: *the churches were established in the faith, and increased in number daily.* They saw that the Gospel was a world-wide Gospel, and they saw that in Jesus Christ is a full salvation.

In the course which they took, they were guided by express intimations of the mind of the Spirit. They *passed through the region of Phrygia and Galatia.* Then was accomplished that work of evangelization to which the Epistle to the Galatians in later years bears testimony. Then was it that *Jesus Christ was set forth before their eyes as though crucified among them.* Then was it that they began to *run well.* Then was it that they *received* St Paul *as an Angel of God, even as Christ Jesus;* and in the ardour of a new affection *would* even *have plucked out their eyes* (*if it had been possible*) *and given them to him.* Not yet were manifested those symptoms of being *hindered that they should not obey the truth;* of regarding him as *become their enemy, because he told them the truth;* of being *entangled again with the yoke of bondage*, and so of being *fallen from grace;* of which he speaks with so bitter a disappointment in the Epistle afterwards addressed to them. Thus far all had prospered. They preached *throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia.*

Then arose hindrances. Their way was accurately defined for them by Him in whose name and strength they journeyed. They *were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. They assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not.* Other work was before them; and it was as though they were

concluded, shut up, unto it. *Passing by Mysia, they came down to* the sea coast at *Troas.* And there the cause of this constraint and of this compulsion began to unfold itself. At Troas *a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia,* proved to be so by the words which he uttered, *beseeching him, and saying, Cross into Macedonia, and help us. When he saw* (*had seen*) *the vision, immediately we sought to go forth into Macedonia,* we began to look out in the harbour of Troas for a vessel bound thitherward, *concluding that God had summoned us to evangelize them,* to preach His Gospel to the inhabitants of that region. And that region was in EUROPE.

The form of the petition contained in the text, and which we may declare without exaggeration to be addressed to all of us in the periodical call of Christian Missions, places in a very attractive light the work to which it refers. *Come over into Macedonia, and help us.* The Gospel which we possess, the Gospel which we are called to hand on, is designed by its Author, and is felt by its true disciples, to be the *help* of man. Easy would it be to speak upon this topic, and ready would be the response to such an exhortation, if we ourselves, we who speak and we who hear, had had experience of the thing spoken of. You would be surprised to observe how full the Bible is of this aspect of the Gospel, and of this view of Him from whom the Gospel is derived. Man wants help; and God, God alone, God in Christ, offers him help, sends him help, ministers to him help day by day.

(1) Instruction is help. We all speak of the helplessness of the blind. See a blind man groping his way from room to room, or from street to street: mark the vacillation of his step, mark the uncertainty of his hand, mark the indefinite, tentative, purposeless way in which he reaches forth for this or that: see how a little child, how a dumb animal, how a lifeless staff, is welcomed as the guide and as the support and as the helper of one thus afflicted: and you will understand what is meant by saying that the light of day, that the sight of the eyes, is scarcely more a pleasure and a comfort than it is an assistance and a help. Now what the light of the Sun is to one who has to move and to

work among the things and the persons of this world, that knowledge is, true knowledge, to a man who has to find his way through the mysteries and through the perils and through the obstructions of this life into an eternal state either of misery or of happiness beyond it. Do not say that there is no helplessness in spiritual blindness. Do not say that a man can walk firmly or act intelligently or journey safely in the things of the soul, of God, of eternity, unless he has some light from above to tell him what those things are, how to be apprehended, and how to be dealt with. Well can you imagine yourself sending a message to an Apostle, or crying aloud to the Saviour Himself, in the very words of the text, Come over to me, and help me! Help me by telling me for certain what I am and where; who is He above me, and what the life beyond; how I can *so pass through things temporal that I finally lose not the things eternal.* While I am ignorant, I am also helpless. O help me first of all by teaching! I want certain knowledge, of things vital to the soul, from One who can say, *We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.*

(2) And comfort is help. See how the Psalmist cries out for help in his hours of distress. Hear him saying, *Show me a token for good: that they who hate me may see it and be ashamed, because Thou, Lord, hast holpen me and comforted me. Holpen, and comforted.* The two things are one. If I could only feel that some one has cared for my soul, it is help at once. It is neglect, it is indifference, it is displeasure and alienation, on the part of One who is everything to me, it is this which disheartens; it is this which makes me feel myself helpless. Let me know, on sure evidence, by infallible proof, that God whom I have displeased yet loves; that God whom I have neglected, dishonoured, contemned, yet desires that I should be saved, is yet my Father, waits for me with outstretched arm, and even before I call is answering; and I can bear anything, I can do anything: the cloud is at once breaking, the palsied limb moves, and the hardened heart softens at that touch into gratitude, hope, and love. It is so for once: it is so when first the Gospel is apprehended as indeed a message

of peace from God. And it is so again day by day, often as the cry of the self-accusing rises into God's presence, and finds there a Father and a Saviour and a Comforter, with whom is mercy and forgiveness, and the kiss of a free unbought compassion. The Gospel which says, *On earth peace;* the Gospel which says, *In Him we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins;* the Gospel which sets forth Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, crucified among us, and for us risen; is indeed help for the helpless and life from the dead.

(3) But I well know that there are hearts in this congregation, of which the inward thought is, The help I need most of all is not mere instruction, and not mere comfort, but rather, in the simplest sense, assistance; aid against difficulties, aid against enemies, aid against temptations, too many and too sore and too strong for me: tell me of a help against these, and I will indeed confess it to be a Gospel. Yes, here we touch the vital point. Is there, in heaven or in earth, a help against our own sins? not so much against the back-reckoning of sin; not so much against its remorse, against its misery, against its punishment, but against its power; its prevailing strength; its malignant, subtle, importunate assaults; its force of repetition, its force of revival, its force of holding in bondage, and its force of retaking into captivity, the poor, struggling, yet impotent and at last despairing soul? I well know, my friends, that your hearts are too honest to be satisfied to call anything less than this a Gospel. I know that you say, If I cannot get free from sin, it is a mockery to tell me that I am free from guilt: if I cannot conquer sin, I am sure that I shall be condemned for sin. Therefore the sacred season which we are now celebrating, the season of Ascension and of Whitsuntide, becomes the practical test of our Christianity. If Easter leads to Pentecost; if, that is, the redemption from guilt is followed by a redemption from sin; if the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ is accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit to *make me free from the law of sin and death;* then the Gospel is a Gospel indeed: then I feel that the Gospel is not a comfort only, but a help: then I see

myself set at liberty for that *service* which *is perfect freedom*, and preparing for that state of sinless holiness which is *the inheritance of the saints in light*. Therefore, in addition to the help of instruction, and in addition to the help of comfort, I want also a help (in the simplest sense) of strength.

Brethren, beloved brethren, *partakers of a heavenly calling*, bring your Gospel, every one of you, to this test. Has it helped you, is it helping you, to be holy? Do you find, when you have taken to heart its comfort, when you have prayed earnestly for its forgiveness, that you are stronger against sin? against your sin, be it what it may? against that hasty temper, against that suspicious, that morose spirit, against that foolish, trifling, worldly disposition, against that uncharitable, that censorious tongue, against that secret, that malignant, that obstinate lust? It ought to be so: it was meant to be so: it has been ever so with true Christians: is it so with you? The cry for help must never stop short with consolation: it must run on to strength. And the honest heart knows this. What makes a true Christian love his Gospel is, that he finds strength in it. Desire earnestly to have it so, and it shall be so to you.

Then will you understand, and then will you welcome, that cry from the uttermost parts of the earth, a cry often unconsciously uttered, yet audible and persuasive in the ear of the true Church, *Come over to us, and help us*. Then will you rejoice and bless God if He enables you to bear any the humblest part in answering that call. You will not seek to evade, you will hail the opportunity: you will say to yourselves, *So much from so little?* Souls helped, perhaps saved, by an almsgiving which costs me nothing? Nay, by God's help, it shall cost me something. I shall be the richer by how much soever I am the poorer. He who is permitted to give to the destitute, lends to the Lord: will the Lord deal deceitfully in his repayment? God give us grace not to bargain with Him and not to barter; but to give Him first *the offering of a free heart*, and then the offering of *a cheerful giver*.

LECTURE XVI.

THE GREAT PRELIMINARY.

Acts xvi. 14.

Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

We read last Sunday of the first summons of the Apostle into our own Europe. In the visions of the night St Paul saw the figure of a stranger, proved by the words uttered to be a Macedonian, standing and praying him, in terms brief but emphatic, to come over into Macedonia and help them. Without this express call, there might have been some hesitation in undertaking so remote and so uncertain a mission. But he whose work was altogether God's work, and whose life was committed entirely into God's hand, saw in this incident an intimation of duty which he could not and certainly would not resist. *When he saw* (*had seen*) *the vision, immediately we sought to go forth into Macedonia; concluding that God had summoned us to evangelize them.*

In this quiet and unobtrusive manner we are first made aware, by the mere change of a pronoun, that we are henceforth (though with large intervals) reading the narrative of an eye-witness. *Immediately we endeavoured.* St Luke then joined Paul and Silas on this occasion at Troas. In common literature we much admire a biographer who keeps himself in the background, and lets his subject speak. Shall we do less when an

Evangelist is the author? We shall respect him for his silence about himself; and we shall draw from that modesty an additional confidence, rather felt than argued, in the trustworthiness of the narrative and the simplicity of the intention.

We owe much, every one of us, to St Luke the Evangelist. But for him we should never have heard, humanly speaking, of Simeon and Anna, *waiting for the consolation of Israel;* of the raising of the widow's son at Nain; of the *woman that was a sinner* in the Pharisee's house; of Mary and the *one thing needful;* of the Parables of the unjust steward, of the rich man and Lazarus, and of the prodigal son; above all, of the penitent dying malefactor, of the disciples journeying to Emmaus, and even (as to any of its graphic details) of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. These were among his special contributions to the Gospel history. And but for him what should we have known of the early history of the Church? Who but he tells us of the great day of Pentecost, of the conversion of St Paul, or of the admission of the first Gentile convert? And who but St Luke gives the narrative of that wonderful life now before us? the life of one who counted not existence dear to him, save in so far as it enabled him to win souls to Christ, and to accomplish by an unexampled self-devotion *the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God?* It is in this last character, as the inspired biographer of an inspired Apostle, that we are now especially to contemplate him.

What we know of his personal history (apart from that of St Paul) is briefly told. It is summed up in St Paul's own words in the salutations which close the Epistle to the Colossians, written during his first imprisonment at Rome, *Luke the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.* I know not that tradition has added much that is certain to that brief designation. Our own Church is contented with that one feature in his history, when in the Collect for St Luke's Day she has instructed us to pray to God as having *called Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist and Physician of the soul;* and to ask of God

that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed. The most real benefactors to the Church have not always been the most obtrusive. Oftentimes we owe most to him of whom we know least. It is thus in this instance.

Now therefore for the first time St Luke is added to that sacred company of which it is written that the risen and ascended Jesus *gave some as Evangelists.* We gather that *God hath called us to evangelize them. We sought to go forth:* we looked out in the port of Troas for a vessel bound thitherward. The vessel is found; and Paul, Silas, Timotheus, and Luke, set forth in quest of new labours in a world unknown.

The lofty island of Samothrace, known in heathen mythology as the abode and watchtower of gods, is passed in their short and prosperous transit between the coasts of Asia and Europe. The next day Neapolis, a Macedonian town, the haven of Philippi; and from thence, at ten miles' distance, the important position of Philippi itself; are successively reached by these first heralds of the Gospel. Philippi, known in all history as the scene of the last overthrow of the Roman Republic before the Roman Empire, is described as *a colony;* that is, one of those military stations by which Rome protected the frontiers of her dominion, and in which the constitution and government of the sovereign city were faithfully, though on a small scale, imitated and reproduced.

And we were in this city, St Luke says, *passing the time*—something perhaps of tedium and of hope deferred may be detected in the expression—*certain days.* At length the door is opened. *And on the sabbath day we went forth outside the gate, beside a river, where we understood that there was a place of prayer; and we sat down, and began to speak to the women who had come together* for the purpose of worshipping. What an example, my friends, for ministers of the Gospel, and for all persons engaged in any work of good, not to count any audience too small, or any circumstances too discouraging, to admit of the prosecution, on a particular occasion, of their labour of love. St Paul, if he had been as one of us, might have said, as he

looked round his little congregation at Philippi, *Only a few poor women! It is not worth while to spend my strength in such paltry toil.* But St Paul had his Saviour's Spirit in him, and counted nothing small by which he could benefit one person or save one soul. And therefore he had his reward.

And a certain woman, by name Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, a worshipper of God, was on this occasion *a hearer* of our words. Among this little Jewish congregation, consisting entirely, on this particular day, of women, was one person, not a native of Philippi, but belonging to the Asiatic city of Thyatira; a place famous for its purple dye, in which it carried on an extensive trade with foreign and distant lands; yet more famous to a Christian student for that record which stands among the Epistles to the Seven Churches in the Revelation of St John, and which teaches us how rapid may be the decline, in a Church or in a soul, from grace once given and from light once received. It may have been in the exercise of her worldly calling—such is the mystery of God's Providence—that this person had been brought to Philippi for the saving of her soul. She was already a worshipper of the true God, according to the Law and Scriptures of Israel: and on this occasion she had gone out, as was doubtless her custom, for the sake of joining in the Jewish worship. *In the way of Thy judgments have we waited for Thee.* He who would find God must seek Him. He who would receive new light must use the light he has; and he who puts himself out of sight of heavenly things has himself to blame if he does not see them.

This person was a listener while Paul spoke. Mark what follows. *Whose heart the Lord* Jesus Christ *opened, to attend (give heed) to the things which were being spoken by Paul.* (1) There were others hearing, but she attended. (2) That attention was a gift of grace. The Lord opened her heart to attend. (3) And once more, having said that the heart was opened to attend, there is no need to add that the heart was opened to believe. To attend to that which is true, and which brings proof of its truth, is to believe it. It was thus afterwards at Berœa. *They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched*

the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so: therefore many of them believed. We pass at once, in the case now before us, from the attention to the baptism. Her heart was opened to attend; *and then she was baptized, and her household.*

The question is asked, and I think reasonably, Were there no children in that household? Does not the language imply the faith of the parent dedicating the children rather than the separate act of several consenting minds? We just point to it, without dwelling upon the question, as affording, like many other passages, a reasonable confirmation of our Church Article which says, *The Baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.*

The first fruit of the new conviction was kindness, hospitality, charity. *When she was baptized, and her household, she entreated, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord*, if you have been so far satisfied of my sincerity and of my faith as to admit me to the ordinance of incorporation, *come into my house, and stay: and she constrained us.* She would take no denial. The strangers to whom she owed her very soul, must be made welcome to the comforts of a Christian home in that foreign and for them disconsolate city. *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained Angels unawares.*

Soon that home was to be exchanged for a prison. But the Christian confessor must be prepared for either fortune: he must enjoy what God gives, when and while he can, and find in that refreshment of spirits strength for the alternative of suffering. These are the vicissitudes of life: most of all, in those who give most to Christ; who have devoted themselves to a Gospel service, and whose only desire it is that they may *finish their course with joy.* Let us, who know no such vicissitudes, at least enquire of ourselves whether in the comforts of society and of a home we are honouring Christ by the devotion of a heart and of a life.

This then was the origin of the Church of Philippi. This was the nucleus of that community to which St Paul addressed, some ten years later, one of the most beautiful and one of the most

comforting of all his Epistles. You see how much, under God's hand, may spring out of how little. One poor woman, and she a foreigner and an alien in that city, has her heart touched by Divine grace in listening to a Gospel sermon. She gives the first house and the first household to the Church in that place. From her and hers the light spreads, till it illuminates a whole region. Who knows but that from her also may have sprung the evangelization of her native city? and that thus two Churches, Philippi and Thyatira, may have been the eventual produce of this one river-side conversation? It is thus in all times: the real work of God is done in individual hearts; and then it spreads forth, from mind to mind and from soul to soul, till, as it is written, the Saviour can *think upon Rahab and Babylon*, upon *them of Tyre with the Morians, among them that know Him.* Very animating, and very admonitory too! It is not in splendid gatherings of the half-hearted, it is rather in some secret wrestling with Satan hand to hand in the lane and in the chamber, that the minister of God is most sure that he is doing God's work, and most hopeful that He who *sees the end from the beginning* may be pleased to bring a whole family or a whole congregation of the saved out of that obscure, that generally discouraging labour.

Whose heart the Lord opened. So then, besides the work of the minister, and besides the work of the hearer, there is also another work necessary, without which the other two will be of no avail.

I am not about to enter into any doubtful or unprofitable speculations. I am not about to discuss the difficult questions of free grace and of free will, in such sense as to adjust the balance between the two agencies, the agency of man and the agency of God. Still less do I purpose to enquire how we are to reconcile God's omnipotence with God's justice on the one hand, or with God's goodness on the other. Least of all shall we ask what is the numerical proportion between the saved and the lost, between those who are rescued through grace and those who are ruined through sin. It is a very grave and a very practical point to which I would direct your thoughts, beloved brethren, to-night.

If there be any such thing as a Divine agency in man's heart, essential to man's salvation, it must be important that we should recognize it, that we should seek it for ourselves, and that we should so seek as that we may also find.

It is said of this first hearer of the Gospel from St Paul's lips at Philippi, that the Lord Jesus Christ opened her heart to attend. Thus attending, the result was faith; and that faith led at once to baptism and to a Christian life.

1. The Lord opened her heart. Then the heart was before closed. What does that mean? Surely that there is a natural indisposition to the things of God. An indisposition not incompatible with much that is amiable and lovely and of good report. Not implying, as a matter of course, habits of open sin or a noticeable spirit of frivolity and trifling. These things may be or may not be. Inclinations vary: what is one man's pleasure would be another's pain: what would be self-indulgence to one is self-denial and self-mortification to another. We cannot judge conclusively, by these signs, of a man's state towards God. Under the moral man's respectability, under the amiable man's affection, under the outwardly religious man's worship, there may lurk a deep, settled, at last inveterate, repugnance to God Himself; an unchanging resolution to keep God out of sight while it can be done; a fixed determination not to come to close quarters with that *sword of the Spirit* which must pierce and wound before it can be safe to heal. Among the hundreds who compose this congregation this evening, I dare not think how many may, while I speak, be listening with closed hearts; listening, that is, without any real desire to give the word entrance; listening with something inside their hearts which must go if God comes, and which they are not willing to dismiss or to let go. In short, there are men and women here present with a bosom sin; cherishing some habit which they know to be immoral, or some feeling which they know to be idolatrous, or some temper which they know to be unchristian. And these persons, though, like her of whom we are reading, they hear; and though perhaps they go so far as to listen; and though perhaps they go so far as to approve what

they hear, and to like what they hear, and to praise what they hear; yet never let the word in: there is an inner secret self, inside the one which is listening, at which the word never arrives and into which it never penetrates. Thus they come, and they go; and they come again, and again they depart; and the heart never opens. Christ knocks at the door, but they leave Him outside: they will not rise for Him nor let Him in. They do not open to Him, because they are enlightened enough to know His terms, and honest enough with themselves to decide against them.

And without this, without this definite reason for disliking Christ, there are other influences at work in keeping the door of the heart closed against Him. In one there is a spirit of levity which makes all serious reflection irksome: the world has not yet turned to bitterness for him, and he would fain enjoy himself while he can. *Not yet, not yet*, is his cry to the Saviour and to His Gospel: *when I have a convenient season*, in other words, when sorrow comes, or sickness, or the near prospect of death, then *I will call for thee*. And without any calculation or any resolution of this kind, there is in the heart of man a postponing and a suspending power, a strength of practical procrastination, which is enough of itself to keep the heart closed against Christ: the very absence of resolution against Him assists the practical exclusion. A man is so nearly a Christian, so little hostile, so little unfriendly, to the Gospel, that he writes himself *not far from the kingdom*, able at any moment by a single step to cross into it. Thus he too has a closed heart; a heart closed by the very idea of its openness.

And then, to pass over a thousand forms and shades of difference, there is yet one other case, by no means uncommon, as I believe, among the hearers of the Gospel. I mean the case of those described in one of St Paul's Epistles as *ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*. I speak of these with all tenderness, with much sadness. There are some who, with a real desire to be saved, can never grasp, throughout life, the simplicity of Christ's salvation. They have either never

heard, or never apprehended, the gracious freedom of the Gospel offer. They have mixed together the promise of life with the necessity of repentance: they have been told that it is in vain to come to God without repentance; that they must first repent and first believe, if not first amend and first be holy, and then God will receive them; that, so long as they feel sin, or the love of sin, strong in them, they are only mocking God and deceiving their own souls by seeking Him: and by this medley of things true and false, by this inversion at least of important truths, by this mixture of conditions and preliminaries and prerequisites with the Gospel of free grace, they have been so perplexed, and so put off, and so discouraged and daunted, that the work of faith has been impossible: they stand afar off, wishing and waiting, instead of *taking the kingdom of God*, as our Lord says, *by force*, and *pressing into it* with a resolute conviction. This has been the effect of erroneous doctrine: in this case a misapprehension of the Gospel has kept the heart closed. O for a voice to sound in the depths of that soul the true, the everlasting, the Divine Gospel! to say, The Gospel is this: not that, if you will do something, God will do the rest: not that, if you will bring repentance, God will give pardon; if you will bring faith, God will give grace: but that, even as you are, dead (it may be) in sin, God loves you; that, however far from home, God is your Father; that, however guilty, however sinful, however unworthy of the least of all His mercies, still you are God's child; and that the work of your redemption and of your salvation is already done for you in Christ. Take God at His word: believe Him when He says that He has laid all your sins upon Christ: try the experiment of coming to Him on that basis: and to you, as to thousands before you, the promise shall be fulfilled: in the very act of stretching out the hand, the strength will be given: in the reception of the glad tidings, the stony heart will be taken away, and a heart of flesh shall replace it: out of the Gospel, not before it, will spring repentance and reconciliation: and the heart, closed against all else, will yield to the inward summons of an atonement already made and a peace already purchased.

2. We have passed insensibly into the second half of the subject; the opening of the heart which before was shut. This opening is ascribed here to the Lord; that is, to our Lord Jesus Christ, acting through the instrumentality of Him whom He promised to send to His disciples from the Father. I will not enlarge upon the method of this opening. Its methods indeed are various as God's agencies and God's attributes. In the case before us, the first hearing sufficed. As the Jewish proselyte sat and listened, her heart was opened to attend. And it has been so with others. The first sound of the Gospel has entered some hearts. More often, perhaps, the opening is gradual. These hearts are very hard, very obstinate, very incredulous, very unimpressible. If God gave but one chance, who could be saved? But He who *desires not the death of a sinner;* He who *will have all men to be saved;* He who will do anything for our salvation, except that one thing which would vitiate it altogether, namely, a constraint and compulsion of conversion; that God, I say, is patient with us, bears long, and tries many means: sometimes a sudden influx of blessing, of earthly, human, domestic blessing, has brought with it a softening of the heart and a turning of the whole man to give thanks and to glorify his Benefactor: sometimes, more often doubtless, the discipline of life in its sterner aspect has wrought reflection, and sorrow for sin, and earnest calling upon God; and he who was bold and reckless in prosperity has been brought home to his Father, penitent and humble, by the stroke of a chastising rod. These things are all various. But, amidst them all, one thing varies not. There is a Divine Spirit, the Holy Ghost, one with the Father and with the Son, proceeding from the Father and from the Son, who works the great change wherever it is wrought; who alone touches the very spring of being, and quickens the dead soul into newness of life. Wherever a heart is really opened, it is the Lord who opens it, and He opens it by the Spirit.

My brethren, among the many reproaches which lie upon the Church of Christ, this surely is of all the greatest, that it has almost lost out of its first elements of truth the doctrine and the faith of the Holy Spirit. The idea of an Atonement

is familiar to all: we are all jealous for it: and how indeed can a sinner be otherwise? how, save in the blood of Jesus Christ, can we find either hope or cleansing? But who really believes in the Holy Ghost? Who really expects, who really prays for, who consciously experiences, the inward working, still more the inward abiding, as a perpetual safeguard and a perpetual comfort, of the Holy Spirit of God? Easter we all feel to be something to us: but this blessed festival of Whit Sunday, who thinks anything of it? Its holy doctrine is far above us, and therefore we let it lie far below; we disregard, we trifle with, we do despite to it.

God grant that it be not so with us! I do not believe that there is any comfort comparable to that of this one revelation. I do not believe that there is one soul here present which is not conscious of its need of it. Which of us even fancies that he can either teach himself, or guide himself, or convert himself, or comfort himself? Which of us does not know by bitter experience that, *when he would do good, evil is present with him?* that, when he would attend to the things which concern his peace, his thoughts fly off to any trifle? that, when he would pray, his heart is silent? that, when he would believe, he doubts, and when he would be holy, he is then most sinful? These experiences should make us value *above gold and precious stone* the promise, the express, the long-tried and ever-faithful promise, *I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever.* That is what we want: a holy, an Almighty, a patient and loving Friend, to live in us; to take charge of us in mind and soul and spirit; to be as near to us as a man's soul is to himself; to preside over every step and regulate every thought; to recall us when we stray, and to raise us when we falter; to be in us *a spring of water bounding up*, day by day and hour by hour, *into everlasting life.* O, put not from you this which would be strength to you and peace and happiness at once and for ever. There is no condition but one. *Your heavenly Father will give His Holy Spirit*, not to them that deserve, but *to them that ask Him.*

LECTURE XVII.

TERMS OF SALVATION.

Acts xvi. 31.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

In one sense the Bible, and each Book of the Bible, is a complete whole. It has a unity of purpose and plan; and to parcel it into minute portions is to detract something from its perfection. In another sense, each portion, however minute, of the sacred history has its completeness, and the more microscopic the inspection, the more satisfactory will be the result.

It is thus with the passage now before us. It is in itself an epitome of the whole history of the Gospel. This one scene at Philippi represents to us what the Gospel is in its operation in all time upon the hearts and minds of men, whether of those who are saved or of those who perish.

You heard on Whit Sunday of the first conversion at Philippi. A woman from Thyatira was a member of that little congregation by the river-side, to which an Apostle did not think it beneath him, or a waste of time, to preach the word. As she listened, the Lord opened her heart. The first result was attention; the attention of the understanding, and the attention of the spirit. The second result (if indeed it can be separated from the first) was conviction: she believed; she felt the truth of what she heard; it commended itself to her conscience; and she was not one of those who, when conscience

speaks, let the still small voice *pass by them as the idle wind, which they regard not.* She believed, and therefore obeyed. She brought her household with her, and was baptized into the Church of Christ.

There is great interest for a minister, and surely for his people also, in observing what is here presented to us, an Apostle waiting for openings. St Paul could not command success. St Paul had to drop the precious seed of the Word at random, *not knowing whether should prosper, either this or that.* He was not listened to by admiring crowds, rushing to destroy their idols and to give themselves for ever to the Lord. One woman was the firstfruits of Philippi: if more are to follow, it must be through circumstances and opportunities not yet disclosed.

It happened that there was at Philippi one of those unhappy persons who were under the influence, and indeed subject to the possession, of an evil spirit. There has been much speculation upon the nature of this possession. A glimpse is given, in the very expression itself, of the nearness to us all of a kingdom of evil; and a solemn warning surely with it of the wisdom and happiness of being so preoccupied, all of us, by the Holy Spirit of God, that the devil, when he *cometh*, may (as it is written of One greater than man) *have nothing in* us. I cannot doubt that it is the intention of Holy Scripture to convey the idea, in these cases, of an actual possession: not of mere delirium, not even of madness in its most aggravated form, but of possession; of a condition in which the bodily and mental organs of a human being were held in thrall by an evil spirit; so that the voice should be the voice of a man, and yet the words the words of an unclean devil. It is not for me to say how nearly present experience may give us the knowledge of this terrible phenomenon. Doubtless in many living men and women there is now something of this double personality. Wherever there is an over-mastering passion, whether of intemperance or evil lust, there is ever found this disunion and discord within: the person *would do good*, and yet *evil is* so

present with him that he cannot. Sin brings division wherever it comes: it destroys that unity within, which is the peace of the soul: it makes a man at war with himself, because he is first at war with his God. Therefore I say—and the experience of many who hear me will confirm the word—that we can even now go a long way towards the understanding of that Satanic possession of which the Scriptures tell. The notion of possession is not strange to us, whatever the doctrine of possession may be. And certainly nothing could have so brought to issue the great strife between Christ and sin, nothing could so have proved to ignorant or scoffing bystanders the power of Christ over the whole empire of evil, as those miracles of His and of His Apostles after Him by which a demoniac was delivered from his possessor, and brought, out of raving and torturing madness, to *sit at the feet of Jesus, clothed*, tranquillized, *and in his right mind.*

Such a person was that damsel at Philippi who met Paul and Silas as they went to the place of prayer by the river-side. The wickedness of man had turned her unhappy condition to a mercenary account. The evil spirit which possessed her was *a spirit of divination.* It enabled her (as we should say) to tell fortunes. And her owners—for she appears to have been a slave, and not only so, but the slave of a body or company of masters—had contrived to make a large gain of this power: it was a speculation, and a successful one; so that they were directly interested in the continuance of that miserable connection with the kingdom of evil from which the power itself was derived.

Alas for the selfishness of men! What is agony to one is the gain of another: and where is he who can forego in the smallest particular his own gain, that he may benefit, or that he may refrain from injuring, the soul or the body for which, as for his own, Christ Himself died?

This poor maiden used to follow Paul and his companions on their way to the place of prayer, crying, *These men are servants of the Most High God, who announce to you a way of*

salvation. Just as the devils are said by St James to *believe that there is one God, and tremble;* just as the demoniacs in our Lord's lifetime below were wont to cry before Him, *I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God;* even so it was now. The maiden possessed with a spirit of divination loudly proclaimed the mission of these heralds of salvation. There was an overmastering influence at work within, which testified to the grace which it refused and repelled.

But this sort of testimony was bitterly painful to one in whom the Spirit of God dwelt. This Gospel preached by an evil spirit, this confession of truth by one for whom truth comes too late, this constraint of mere power and mere terror making one who is lying in chains of darkness proclaim to others how to escape from them, wounded the holy and loving heart of St Paul more than any opposition or any cruelty. He turned at last, and in the name of his Divine Master bade the evil spirit to come out. He came out, and with him all hope of future gain for those who had made a traffic of the possession. *Her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone.* Instead of rejoicing that the fatal snare was broken and an immortal soul delivered, these men could only look at their own selfish interests and count over the loss of base lucre which the change had brought with it for them. Such, my brethren, is selfishness, *when it is finished;* when it has reached its full developement, and is seen in the repulsive flower, or in the bitter nauseous fruit. Such is selfishness. A thing which makes a man regret another's salvation. A thing which makes a man first traffic in another's ruin and then mourn over another's escape. God keep us all from its first risings: for indeed it is a fearful thing to know its later effects.

Nothing could now be done by these selfish, these wicked men, but to revenge themselves upon the human instruments of this miraculous cure. They seized upon Paul and Silas, and brought them before the magistrates, on the double charge of creating a disturbance in their city, and of introducing

innovations in their religion. The population of the place was easily excited against two Jewish strangers; and the magistrates gave sentence that it should be as they desired. They themselves rent off the prisoners' clothes, and issued the cruel order to their officers to inflict upon them the disgraceful and savage scourge. Then, all bruised and bleeding, they were handed over to the jailor with a special charge for their safe keeping. The jailor acted duly upon his instructions: he thrust them into the inner prison, and forced their feet into the stocks. Thus, under a false charge and without a trial; with all the sense of injustice fresh upon them, and all the misery of present suffering to keep the wound open; they are left to pass a night—and they know not how many nights may follow it—in the cold and darkness and hunger of a Roman prison, and to ponder alike the danger of their position and the discouragement of their work.

There must be something in the Gospel, and something in the love of Christ and the consolations of His Spirit, if two men, like ourselves by nature in body and mind, could endure patiently, much more endure joyfully, circumstances so painful and so depressing. The well-known words, *And at midnight Paul and Silas* in their dungeon *prayed and sang praises unto God,* have a sweet music in them for anxious and troubled souls. The thought of those *songs in the night;* verses, perhaps, from our own sacred Book of Psalms, so full of appropriate words for the prisoner and the captive; of those prayers in the jail of Philippi, which have been the example and model of so many Christian confessors and martyrs in all times in their long hours of patient suffering for the truth's sake; may well both encourage and shame us; encourage us by its testimony to the living grace of Christ, and yet shame us by the comparison of our luxurious softness with their noble endurance and their bold confession.

The prisoners heard them. The original language says, *were listening to them.* Strange unwonted sounds must those have been, those prayers and those hymns, in a heathen prison-house: well might they listen. Their attention thus fixed on the

remarkable, the unearthly character of these two inmates of the prison, they could not but connect with them and their fortunes the extraordinary scene which followed. *Suddenly there was a great earthquake; the* very *foundations of the prison were shaken;* every door was opened, and every fetter loosened. The jailor himself, *awakened out of his sleep and seeing the prison-doors open*—aware of the consequences to himself of what he could not but think inevitable, the escape of his prisoners—flew directly, as Romans were apt to do, to the thought of suicide as the readiest escape from the troubles of that only world in which he believed. *He drew his sword, and was about to kill himself.* It was one of those prisoners themselves who kept him from executing his purpose. Instead of profiting by the confusion to effect his escape, St Paul could look also upon *the things of others*, and use the precious moment to save a life and to save a soul. *Do thyself no harm*, he cried, *for we are all here.* The extraordinary thoughtfulness which thus expressed itself; the terrible excitement of the moment, stripping off all the disguises of habit and education, and bringing the soul itself face to face with reality and with destiny; and amidst and above all, the grace of God working of His good pleasure; wrought in a moment the work of years, and made this rough Roman soldier, using the phrase of a religious and spiritual earnestness, ask of these his own prisoners the question ever accompanying salvation, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* He addresses them as his masters—so profound was the impression of their connection with the strange events of the night—and he speaks of himself as a lost man needing salvation. To suppose less than this, to imagine him to enquire only what he must do to escape from the danger of the earthquake and of the opened jail, is to make the narrative as incoherent as it would be trifling. The answer shows, if nothing else, that, along with and by the help of the terrors of the outward scene, there was working in this man's heart, ignorant as it was and hitherto careless and selfish and sin-bound, that first doubt, that first consciousness, and that first stirring of life, which makes a man aware, as never before,

of the reality of a judgment, an eternity, and a wrath to come, and eager to find some way of escape from a future which he feels to be all ruin for one who has died in his sins. *What must I do to be saved?* We can all fill up that question. We can all see that it means, *How can I be saved from a condemnation which must light at last upon all sin? How can I a wicked man stand before God in the day of judgment? How can I hope to escape that everlasting fire, of remorse and anguish, which must consume in the end those who have all their lifetime fought against conviction, against repentance, against grace, against God? Is there any hope—if I find it betimes—for a sinful man to become just with God? Is there any thing that I can do to get rid of this overwhelming load of guilt which lies like a mill-stone about my neck, and threatens to sink me like lead in the mighty waters of a righteous judgment? And O, if there be such a thing as a forgiveness for past sin, is there, is there any such thing as an escape out of the bondage of sin into the freedom of holiness? out of the death of nature into the life of God? What must I do to be saved?*

So cries the hardened transgressor in the day when judgment first flashes upon him. So cries the thoughtless lover of the world in the day (and does not the day come?) when pleasure turns to ashes in the mouth, and vanity to bitterness in the soul. So cries many a human heart, in childhood and youth, in manhood and age, in the day when the still small voice speaks within, and reminds of a Father's love slighted and a Father's home deserted. *What must I do to be saved?* And there is an answer to that question: an answer still vocal, still audible, eighteen centuries after it was first uttered and listened to in the Apostle's jail at Philippi: an answer still effectual, if it be received with the heart; but capable, like all truth, of being negligently accepted or idly trifled with or unthankfully trampled underfoot by those who will: the very answer contained in the text, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

Then indeed it was listened to. The soil was prepared for

the seed: and in the ground of a quickened earnestness, a devout attention, and a reverent and godly fear, the seed *took root downward and bare fruit upward* unto life eternal. As the jailor heard the word spoken in that inner prison, by men whose feet the night before, as he thrust them in with violence, he had rudely *hurt in the stocks;* heard it with his family gathering around, that the good work might spread and have free course and be glorified; a sure though secret operation of the Divine Spirit gave energy to the word; opened the understanding to understand it, and opened the heart to attend and to believe; and that very dungeon which had resounded with prayers and songs amidst distress and torture now witnessed the first offices of Christian charity, and the administration to many persons of the initiatory rite of Christian baptism. *He took them in that hour of the night, and washed them from their stripes; and was baptized, himself and all his, straightway.*

Some tardy feelings of a reasonable compunction, or perhaps the experience of the earthquake and the tidings which reached them from the prison, led the magistrates who had hastily condemned, as hastily to reverse the decision of yesterday. They sent in the morning to order the release of the two prisoners. But Paul, who was as firm on occasion in asserting his rights of Roman citizenship as he was patient in submitting on occasion to their infringement; who knew, in short, when to press and when to relax his human rights as God's Providence and God's Spirit pointed in this direction or that; now declined to accept a secret and surreptitious release from a place marked by God's hand for a glorious triumph of the Gospel. The discharge itself was a confession of injustice: let the Gospel, let Christ Himself, be openly honoured in it. Let the magistrates come themselves, and supplicate the indulgence of their prisoners. They have done a cruel wrong: let them at least say, in the face of the people, that the messengers of the Gospel are no malefactors, and that the word which they preach is no message of insubordination or of immorality. When the world is brought for once to the foot of the cross, it becomes not the ministers of Christ to

forego the avowal of His triumph. The magistrates *feared when they heard that they were Romans, and came and besought them, and requested them to depart from the city.*

The work of God was well begun there. The seed was cast into the ground, and men might *sleep and rise, night and day,* secure that that Divine seed would now *spring and grow up,* though they *knew not how.* The Church of Philippi was now safely planted: and therefore they might now say, like their Divine Master Himself, *Let us go into the next towns, and preach there also: for therefore came I forth.* With all quietness and all dignity they chose their own time: *they came out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. We have touched upon the question: let us not separate without an endeavour to understand the answer.

My brethren, there are those who tell us that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a worn-out creed; a religion which has had its day, and must be replaced by one more suitable to this later age and to this advanced civilization. Alas! that we cannot all rise, even in a Christian congregation, and say as with one voice, *The Gospel is not obsolete, for it has saved and regenerated me.* That would be the best of answers to the infidel's taunt: and it is just the answer which we cannot return. O for that inward power which alone in any age opens hearts to listen! O for that *grace preventing and following,* which alone turns the dead page into a living and a quickening spirit! It is not the Gospel which is obsolete: it is we who have lost the key to it. It is not the cross of Christ, or the risen life of Christ, which has lost its power: it is we who make the one an excuse, and the other a phantom. Let the keen two-edged sword cut deep; let the fabric of a self-righteous morality break down within; let a sinner, about whose sin there is, to himself at least and before God, however it may be in the eyes of the world, no mistake and no evasion, have to look

death in the face, and to settle, once for all, whether there is for him personally any hope or none; let these things be, as they are, for one or another, taking place every day in every town and every village of England; and you will soon see whether the healing virtue is gone away out of the blood of Christ: you will find that, in those crises and emergencies of the spiritual life, it is as much wanted and as available (blessed be God) as ever: what the insolence of youth and the presumption of prosperity has spurned is *life from the dead* to him *who knows the plague of his own heart* and the defilement of his own nature: again and again, as each year runs its course, the *balm of Gilead*, the consolation of the Gospel, is tried over and over in cottages and in palaces, and when truly tried, never found wanting: it is found by experience, though of necessity that experience is not public but private, not gregarious but individual and personal, that a sense of guilt, an accusing and condemning conscience, which nothing else could soothe, has been soothed by the blood of sprinkling; and that a fetter of evil habit which nothing else could break off, has been broken off, as by the earthquake in the jail of Philippi, by the grace of Christ's cross and by the power of Christ's resurrection. The question, *What must I do to be saved?* has been answered again and again by the brief exhortation of the text, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

But for one who either asks that question earnestly, or receives that answer decisively, thousands put off the one, and thousands play with the other. Of all those whom I address in this house of God this evening, how many have really settled that great, that chief question, *Have I any hope for eternity? and what is it?* The very knowledge of the answer, the very orthodoxy of our creed, the very familiarity of our faith, make it more than ever a temptation to postpone seeking salvation. What can be done any time is done never. That Gospel which, to be worth anything, must be a free Gospel; a Gospel for the most guilty, and a Gospel for the most sinful; is made nugatory for us by its very freeness: *O*, we say, *a deathbed will be time*

enough! And thus that which would be life to us now is made death to us by its abuse: and the Gospel itself, the glorious Gospel of the grace of God, is made despicable to the doubting and scoffing world by the fault and the sin of us its professors. If a congregation like this could say, collectively and individually, *The Gospel has saved us: the Gospel has saved me;* the world could not stand against it. But we come here week after week to dally and temporize and trifle with the Gospel; at best, to keep our hold upon it; at best, to prevent its utterly escaping us; at best, to secure a sort of claim upon its deathbed consolations: and what is the effect? What can be the effect, save this? that the world calls our Gospel worn out, because it evidently does not save, because it evidently has not transformed us; because we its professors are just as worldly, just as selfish, just as sinful, as the worst of its impugners; because *the children of this world are wiser*, far wiser, *in their generation than the children of light;* because *the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we*, we ourselves, *are not saved.* For the Gospel's sake, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, if not for our own sake, wipe out the reproach. Come to Him who casts out none who come to Him earnestly, that you may drink of that water which is life to the soul, and be emancipated for that service which is perfect freedom.

LECTURE XVIII.

THE HOPEFUL SIGN.

ACTS XVII. 11, 12.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed.

He gave some, it is written of the gifts of Christ to men, *as evangelists; and some as pastors and teachers.* And the work of the two is different. The Evangelist comes first. *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.* He comes where Christ is not yet named, to gather out of the unbelieving world *a people for His name.* And then he is followed by the pastor or teacher, who carries on by daily ministration the work which the Evangelist has begun.

Now St Paul was acting on this journey as an Evangelist. He had a wide field to cover. Persecuted in one city, he must flee to another; or else the publication of the Gospel to all nations will never be made before the Lord come. As an Evangelist, he publishes the glad tidings, and hurries on: as an Apostle, he ordains in every city those pastors and teachers who are to build up the Church upon the one foundation once laid. The time came, indeed, when he was to be stopped in his work: but that hindrance must come in the direct course of God's Providence, and not by any imprudence or by any rashness

of his own. St Paul could trust himself not to be cowardly: it was a grace therefore in him to be prudent.

Driven from Philippi, as we read last Sunday, after shame and suffering; but leaving behind him there the nucleus already formed of that happy and holy congregation to which he addressed, ten years later, one of the tenderest and most comforting of his Epistles; he took his journey, as the 1st verse of this chapter tells us, *through Amphipolis and Apollonia*, and *came to Thessalonica.*

Thessalonica, unlike some other places of which we read in the Scripture history, has retained its importance, and almost its name, to this very day. It is an imposing city, rising tier above tier on a steep ascent fronting the sea; and contains still some seventy thousand inhabitants, of whom many, now as in St Paul's days, are Jews by race.

In this city stood what is here called *the synagogue of the Jews:* I suppose, the synagogue of the district: in Philippi, you heard, there was none; only a customary place of prayer by the river-side.

So Paul, *according to his custom*, first entered the synagogue; claimed his right to the national privilege, asserted his adherence to the national faith, and used the basis of a common belief in the Old Testament Scriptures as the means of building up the superstructure of a Saviour's doctrine. We read that *for three sabbaths he discoursed to them from the Scriptures; opening* to them that Book which was as yet closed and sealed from them as to its true meaning, *and alleging*, adducing evidence out of that Book itself to show, *that it was necessary that the Christ*, the Messiah, the promised Saviour, *should suffer, and rise from among the dead; and that this Person is the Christ*, even *Jesus whom*, he said, *I announce to you. Necessary that the Christ should suffer;* because the Scriptures had so said, and because the Scriptures must be fulfilled. It is the very same argument, and the very same word, which our Lord Himself used to the two disciples on the evening of His resurrection. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?*

And then, *beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* It is thus here with His Apostle. He shows, as he showed in detail, in the 13th chapter, at Antioch in Pisidia, first, that the Scriptures speak of a suffering Messiah, a Saviour dying and rising; and secondly, that these Scriptures all meet and are fulfilled in the proved and established history of Jesus of Nazareth.

And some of them were persuaded. Some: even when St Paul preached, not all. The heart must be opened to attend, or even an Apostle reasons and expostulates in vain. Some believed, even in that Jewish audience, *and attached themselves to Paul and Silas;* following up, as we read (in the 13th chapter) of some of the hearers at Antioch, the public teaching by private converse, and seeking to improve to the uttermost their brief opportunity of profiting by an Apostle's presence. *And of the devout Greeks,* the worshipping Gentiles, that is, the proselytes to Judaism from among the Gentile inhabitants, *a great number, and of the chief women not a few.*

Thus the Gospel fire was thoroughly kindled; and that fire is a fire of division as well as of enlightenment. *The Jews became jealous, and took to them some worthless men of the idle sort*—properly, *of the frequenters of the market-place;* of those idle loungers who are the plague of every town, destitute of proper occupation, and refusing that honest labour which is man's safety and man's glory—*and having made a mob they threw the city into disturbance; and besetting the house of Jason,* where the Apostle and his companions were lodging, *they sought to bring them before the people;* before the public assembly, which acted both as the legislature, and (in important cases) the tribunal also of the city. Failing to find the Apostles, *they dragged Jason,* the owner of the house, *and some brethren,* some of the new Christian converts, *before the magistrates.* It was the old charge again. These men had *turned the world upside down* by their new doctrines. They were *acting in the face of the decrees of Cæsar,* of the Roman Emperor, *saying that there is another king,* one *Jesus. The*

disciple is not greater than his Lord. This was the charge against the Saviour Himself. *Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar. The superscription of His accusation was written over: This is Jesus the King of the Jews.* In vain is it answered, *My kingdom is not of this world.* In vain is it urged that the spiritual kingdom is consistent with, is a friend to, is the sure support of, every earthly throne: where there is a will to oppose, there will not be wanting a pretext: and the orderly and peace-loving Gospel is represented as a disloyal, a factious, a revolutionary innovation.

By an iniquitous sentence, Jason and his companions were bound over by due securities to preserve the peace of the city; and the Evangelists of the Lord and Saviour were in consequence banished from its walls. By night they were got out of the city, and after a journey of 50 or 60 miles they reached Berœa, a town of less size and importance, but which has furnished the Christian reader in every subsequent age with a far brighter and more profitable example.

On their arrival they went forth into the synagogue of the Jews. And these were more noble, more generous and more ingenuous, *than those at Thessalonica: for they accepted the word* spoken by Paul *with all readiness of mind, daily examining the Scriptures, whether these things were so* as he said; whether his arguments from the Old Testament were valid, in the two points; the prediction of a suffering Messiah, and the correspondence of that prediction with the life and the word, the character and the history, of Jesus. *Many therefore from among them* —even here not all—*believed.*

Thus have we presented to us, within the compass of a few verses the history of the evangelization of two places; Thessalonica and Berœa. In each there are points of resemblance; and there are also, between the two, points of difference.

The points of resemblance are, (1) the mode of the preaching, and (2) its twofold result: *some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.* It was so everywhere. But, looking at the two places generally and in summary, it is

noticed that there was a contrast; a difference in their way of hearing and in their manner of enquiring into truth, even when (unhappily) the result of enquiry was not favourable to the Gospel.

1. It is deeply interesting to be able thus to individualize some of the congregations to which St Paul ministered. We all know that there are such differences now between different places and different congregations. There are personal varieties of character, and there are also local varieties. Between one country and another, between one part of one country and another part, between the North and South, between the East and the West, of our own country, there are many noticeable differences. A Clergyman settling in a new Parish is struck very speedily by some characteristic peculiarities even in the religious condition and disposition of his people. These characteristics are the result of many various and long-working influences. Often the ministry has to be blamed or praised for them. A town in which a faithful and exemplary pastor has long been at work, bears the impress of his hand for a generation or two after he has departed. And the absence of such a ministry; the defects of a man's preaching, the faintness of a man's zeal, or the inconsistencies of a man's life; will leave an opposite stamp for years to come upon the state and character of his congregation. These things are matters of experience, and they are noticed for our admonition.

Most safely are they noticed, when we can turn for them to the Scripture. Who that reads the Epistles of St Paul could for one moment confuse or interchange the spiritual characteristics of the Churches of Corinth, of Philippi, of Galatia, of Thessalonica? Take the last of these. We have heard the disparagement of Thessalonica. Berœa was more noble, because it received the word frankly, and searched the Scriptures for its confirmation or else for its refutation. In the same degree there is a reflection upon Thessalonica. It was less noble in this respect. But there were those, even in Thessalonica, who had all the nobleness of Berœa. Look at St Paul's Epistles

to them; his two Epistles; written the very first of all his Epistles, and not many months probably after he had first quitted them. Look at his account of that congregation from which he was so early separated. We scarcely know a more beautiful or a more encouraging portraiture. I commend it to your study. How it fills up the gaps in the sacred narrative! How it peoples with living men and women the somewhat dry and summary record on which we have been dwelling!

(1) Observe there how St Paul had treated them: with what loving tenderness: like a father, he says; *we exhorted and comforted and charged you, as a father doth his children:* and then, lest that should not be enough, like a mother also; *we were gentle among you, even as a nursing mother cherisheth her own children.* What a picture of the true pastor! not a *lord over God's heritage*, not one *having dominion over their faith*, not one who rules and censures and threatens, but just a loving friend; as he himself says elsewhere, *a helper of their joy;* the kind father, yea the gentle mother also, of his people.

(2) Notice too, in another point, his conduct among them. *Ye remember*, he says, *our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable to any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God.* St Paul was a very diligent man. He was no idle lounger. He was not a man of society, affecting the manners or mingling in the amusements of the higher ranks of his people. He worked at his own trade, and set an example to all men of the duty as well as the honour of fallen man eating bread in the sweat of his brow. If we, my brethren, by changes of times, and, as we trust, by God's overruling goodness, are exempted from the necessity of working for our bread in the exercise of this ministry, let us at least take heed that that toil which is saved from the one be given to the other; that nothing be more plain concerning us than that we work hard and work long; that we have indeed a calling, and a duty, and a toil too, amongst you, in which we may at once set an example and also cheer your way.

(3) It is more profitable to remember what it was which St Paul taught his people. We have a full though incidental record of it in those two Epistles.

First of all, it was a Gospel. That was its character throughout. It was a message of comfort and joy to fallen man. It brought him the assurance of God's love. It told him that his sins are forgiven him for the Lord's sake. But it did not leave him even there. I know of no mockery so great, as that which tells a man of forgiveness and cannot tell of cleansing. What is it to me to be told that God forgives, if you cannot add that God will take away from me my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh? yea, will give me His Holy Spirit to live in me and to work in me effectually? This then was St Paul's doctrine: a free forgiveness first, and then also a free spirit.

And in the strength of that offer, of that promise, he was not afraid to preach to them of duty. He knew that, the higher the attainment proposed, the more comforting is the assurance implied. He who says, *Stretch forth thine hand*, says by implication, *I will enable thee.* Hence the true comfort of a call to holiness. God does not mock us, whatever man may do, by His summons to holiness and to freedom. *This is the will of God, even your sanctification:* and if it is His will that we should be holy, certainly He *will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.* Hence flow all those particulars of duty of which the last chapter of that 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians contains so large a detail.

But St Paul knew—he was taught of God to know—that, if you would inspirit a man for duty, you must inspire a man with hope. Therefore he fixed their eyes upon a coming; a personal coming; an Advent of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; which should be to mankind the reparation of all evil and the introduction of all good: an Advent in which *blessed and holy is he who shall have part*, and in which moreover no man shall lose his interest by having died before it. *We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not*

prevent (*anticipate*) *them that are asleep.* Therefore *sorrow not,* he said to them, *concerning them that are asleep, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him* (*Jesus*).

He seems too, when he was with them, to have darkly foreshadowed to them some of those destinies of the Church and of the world in later time, into which even now we can but peer with doubt and guessing. The revelation of the Man of Sin, with his foregoing hindrances, his precursors and concomitants, must have formed an anxious and formidable accompaniment to the prediction of that Advent which is to consume him. And these things are or ought to be as much our expectation as theirs. For us, as for them, these things are still future; we dare not say, still distant. God keep us faithful to that twofold work of the Gospel in the Thessalonian converts, *Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come.*

(4) There is yet one point to be noticed, before we turn, in the last place, from Thessalonica to Berœa. And that is, the rapidity of the work of God in the congregation of which we have spoken. For three Sabbath days, St Luke here says, St Paul reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. He almost leaves us to the conclusion that three short weeks filled up the measure of St Paul's stay amongst them. But suppose it to have been prolonged beyond this narrowest limit. Still a few weeks at the very utmost must have comprised it: then he left them, and in the two Epistles he speaks only of what had passed in that one visit: he had never seen them again since he first parted from them by night to set forth to Berœa. And yet—for this is the point of notice—what an account does he give of the work already wrought in them! *Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* Nay, *ye were ensamples to all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia.* My brethren, it is our own fault if the

Gospel of the grace of God works in any of us slowly, or works in any of us indecisively. A few short weeks are enough, in God's hand, not only for the first great transition from darkness to light, but even for a complete transformation of the heart and of the life. In a few short weeks, three or more, these Thessalonians had been turned in some cases—for so the words imply—from worshippers of dumb idols into servants of the living God and expectants of His Son from heaven. It pleases God now and then to give us, even us, a glimpse of the same possibility because of the working of the same power. The season of Confirmation has been blessed erenow—I humbly hope that it was blessed recently in some instances—to this great and glorious result. The man who confesses his sins heartily may find mercy at once: and the man who prays honestly for God's Holy Spirit may find himself at once made strong through Him unto a complete change of life.

(5) Yet let us not lose the force of that solemn admonition, that *he who thinketh he standeth* must always *take heed lest he fall.* Scarcely had St Paul left Thessalonica after this marvellous experience of the converting and transforming grace of God, than he sends back Timotheus, in the extremity of his loving anxiety, to see *lest by any means the tempter had tempted them, and* so *his labour should be in vain.* We are still in an enemy's country, however armed. We are still in the region of death, however full of life. Even from our Lord Himself, after His great temptation, the devil *departed* but *for a season:* let us take heed, every one of us, lest confidence breed presumption, presumption sin, *and sin, when it is finished,* in us *bring forth death.*

2. And now, my brethren, one last word must suffice for the example of the other place brought before us this evening, the city of Berœa. Its application is different from the former. In speaking of Thessalonica, we have spoken of the Christian congregation there gathered out of a world of Judaism or of heathenism. In speaking of Berœa, we are to think of the proper treatment of the Gospel on the part of those who have

not yet been convinced by it. The nobleness of the Berœans was shown, not in their way of acting upon a Gospel already believed, but in their way of trying the credentials of the Gospel first heard. They carried St Paul's statements to the standard which they already possessed. Believing, as Jews or proselytes, the Old Testament Scriptures, they went to those Scriptures for information, and they acted upon those Scriptures as their guide. They did not refuse the Gospel because it contradicted their previous opinions; neither did they, in an excess of credulity, receive it because it was presented to them. They listened to it with the readiness of a candid spirit, and they daily examined their Scriptures to see whether its language and their language were the same. *Many therefore of them believed.*

We, my brethren, are not exactly in their case, and yet we have much to learn, every one of us, from their example. If the teaching of this place were carried back by all of you to your Bible; if when we urge upon you any particular duty, or press upon your attention any feature or any side of the truth, you would *receive the word*, like these Berœans, and in the same sense only, *with all readiness*, and then examine your Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures to see whether what you have heard has God's sanction for it, or no; how interesting would become the work of hearing and (let me add) the work of teaching. You would feel that you were engaged in a pursuit of truth; that it was not a question of pleasure or of natural interest in the things spoken, but a question of right and wrong, of truth or error, and therefore also of life and death: you would come hither not to criticize, but to learn; and you would go hence, not to discuss but to digest. You would go back to your Bible, to *compare spiritual things with spiritual*, and, according as you should find, so to judge and so to act. And we on our part should feel that we were furnishing matter for the most serious pondering and for the most important decisions; that we were aiding you in settling the most momentous questions, and that the words here uttered were indeed, under

God's blessing, full of grave consequences both in hearts and lives.

May it be so more and more. Be assured that out of such enquiries and such reasonings within springs forth a full-flowing stream of satisfaction, strength, and peace. The word here written speaks of an examination, a daily examination, of God's holy Book. It is the same expression which denotes the examination of a witness, or the trial of a challenged life. Let us thus put the Word of God upon its trial. Let us not treat it as a dead, unmeaning, monotonous thing; to be carried in the hand, or read at Church, or suffered on the table; but rather as a living person, to be questioned, to be interrogated, to be heard and listened to and judged. Let us say to it, *What sayest thou? What dost thou tell me? What hast thou to offer in thine own behalf, or concerning another? Speak to me, answer me, be not silent; but speak, and hold not thy peace.* So treated, the Bible will become to us a voice, not a page only. So treated, we shall at last be able to say, *Thy Word is tried to the uttermost, and thy servant loveth it.* So treated, the consequence for us, as for the Berœans of old, will be this at last, *They searched the Scriptures daily; therefore many of them believed.*

III.

THE CHURCH OF THE WORLD.

LECTURE I.

THE ANONYMOUS ALTAR.

Acts xvii. 23.

To the unknown God.

A Gospel should be a word for all men. It is one test of a real Gospel, that it can overleap all barriers placed between man and man by age and condition, by race and circumstance, by character and education, and find its way into that innermost kernel and heart's core of nature which *makes the whole world kin.*

It is so, we believe—it is so, we have proof—with our Gospel. Already in this one Book we have seen it dealing with the Jew, and we have seen it dealing with the Gentile: we have seen it in Palestine, and we have seen it in Asia Minor: we have seen it in Asia, and we have seen it in Europe: we have seen it at Antioch, we have seen it in Cyprus, we have seen it at Lystra, we have seen it at Philippi, we have seen it at Thessalonica, we have seen it at Berœa: everywhere it has found some hearts into which it entered as a healing balm, some lives which it was able to penetrate with transforming power. And tonight we are to see it at Athens.

We must not stay to describe St Paul's progress toward that city. Though the people of Berœa were in general *more honourable* than those of Thessalonica in their first treatment of the Gospel; not condemning it unheard, but searching the Old

Testament Scriptures to see *whether those things were so*; yet they did not all believe: there were many unconvinced—it always is so—by Gospel evidences; and these unimpressed or undecided hearers were open to the evil influences of more designing and malignant men. Jews from Thessalonica followed in the track of the Apostle, and stirred up the same excitement at Berœa which had already driven him from amongst themselves.

Such was the immediate cause of that visit to Athens which brought St Paul for once into direct contact and conflict with the most refined and enlightened forms of Greek civilization. Leaving his companions Silas and Timotheus to complete his work at Berœa, he had been escorted by some new friends, the firstfruits of his ministry there, to that great and far famed city which has left an indelible impress upon the arts and upon the literature and upon the philosophy of the world.

He was left there, for a time, alone. The Berœans who had accompanied him were gone, and Silas and Timotheus were not yet come. The Epistle to the Thessalonians tells us that he had longer to wait for them than the history seems to say. He *thought it good to be left at Athens alone*, while Timotheus went back to see how it fared with the Thessalonian congregation. At all events, he was now alone in Athens. Some of us know that sinking of the spirits which is occasioned by loneliness in a strange city. They have felt what it is to be cut off from every loved and familiar face, and to be compelled to move through crowded streets with a desolateness only aggravated by numbers. They can understand something—but I fear they can scarcely understand all—of that which St Paul felt in his lonely sojourn in Athens. St Paul was a man of quick feeling, of lively emotion, and of the gentlest affection: in these things he was not only one of us, he was far before us all. But even these were not the causes of his chief distress during this stay in Athens. St Paul's life was given to one work, and his whole heart was in it. Many a Christian man—such as we now call Christians—has tarried in a superstitious or idolatrous place, and seen nothing in it but the antiquity of its associations or the

curiosity of its monuments. But wherever St Paul was, there was his entire devotion, his earnest faith, his burning zeal, his self-forgetting love. At Athens, where the traveller feels nothing but a thrill of historic and poetic interest; where it would be judged by many a mere narrowmindedness to remember the Gospel, and a mere loss of time to be communing with Christ; St Paul was just what he was everywhere: not unmoved, it may be, by recollections of an heroic patriotism, or by sights and scenes of indestructible beauty; but a man of God, a servant of Christ, still: he could not dissever the magnificence of a temple or the perfection of a statue from the remembrance of the idolatry which it served and of the souls which it debased: and so it is written, that, *while Paul waited for* his friends *at Athens, his spirit was stirred* (*provoked* or *irritated*) *within him as he beheld how the city was idol-ridden*, filled and occupied by idols.

St Paul's irritation was not, as is too often the case with us, a merely vexing and annoying thing, torturing to himself and to all about him: on the contrary, it stirred him to action; it set him considering what he could do to remedy (in whole or in part) the evil which he deplored. At Athens, as elsewhere, there was a Jewish synagogue: there at all events he might find some to sympathize with his horror at idolatry; there too he might at least argue from the common ground of Scripture, and assume both the unity of the Godhead and the expectation of a Christ. *He discoursed*, or *reasoned, in the synagogue with the Jews and with the devout persons;* that is, as before, with the proselytes to Judaism. How successfully, we know not: topics of still greater interest demand our attention. The Jews he had with him always: the Athenians he met but for once: this was their day, the season of their visitation.

Accordingly we read that *in the market-place* also—the far-famed Agora of Athens, with its marvellous works of art and records of greatness—*he discoursed*, or *reasoned, daily with those who met with him.* St Paul was not too proud, or too reserved, or too indolent, or too half-hearted, to seize opportunities of conversing with strangers. He felt that no man was a stranger

to him: a man with a soul to be saved or lost must have, for him, a ground of interest and a point of contact. Thus the next verse tells us that in these daily conversations there encountered him some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who had in Athens the birthplace and the capital of their several schools of science. The Epicureans were the Atheists, and the Stoics the Pantheists of antiquity; the one dreaming of a world made by chance, the other of a world containing the Deity: the one bidding man to *eat and drink because tomorrow he dies*, the other, to wrap himself in his virtue and to count it the height of human attainment not to feel. Strange collision, that of these philosophies with the Gospel! Strange meeting, between a man who lived but for duty, yet found that duty in love divine and human, and those who either denied the existence of a duty, or else made duty another name for hardness! We can imagine—the discourse which follows will help us to do so—the sort of converse between these philosophers and the Apostle: how he would avail himself of any shred and fragment of the truth in the creed of each, and show exactly where it lost itself in error: how he would urge alike upon each the reality of a personal God in direct relation to a personal man; of a God to whom man's state is not indifferent, and a man who must give account of himself to God: how he would do battle, on grounds even of a natural religion, alike with the pride of the Stoic and with the pleasure-worship of the Epicurean; to the one exposing man's weakness, to the other presenting God's law: how he would lay the one low before God, and seek to lift the other from the earth on which he was grovelling.

Very brief, yet withal very graphic, is the account here given of the treatment of the Gospel by the Athenian philosophers. *Some said, What would this babbler say?* What is that which this mere picker-up and retailer of nothings would express to us if he could? No language could be more contemptuous. It represents the Apostle as a mere reporter of idle tales picked up from others, and as a man incapable even of expressing the follies which he has adopted. Others took a more serious view

of the case. *He seems to be an announcer of strange* (or *foreign*) *divinities;* a sort of travelling missionary of false gods, desiring to add new names to an already overflowing Pantheon. Whence this idea? *Because*, St Luke adds, *he preached the gospel of Jesus and the Resurrection.* The names of Jesus and the Resurrection occurred so frequently in his conversations, that they, interpreting him by themselves, ran to the conclusion that they were the names of two deities whom he sought to incorporate in the national religion. And if this were so, it was a case requiring the cognizance of the great religious court of Athens; that ancient and august tribunal which was named from holding its sessions on the Areopagus, or hill of Mars. *They took hold of him and led him to the Areopagus; saying, Can we know*, art thou able to inform us, *what this new doctrine which is spoken by thee is? for thou introducest some strange things to our ears: we wish then to know what these things would fain be;* what is the meaning and import of these things. A brief word of comment on the Athenian character is here introduced by the narrator. *All Athenians and the sojourning foreigners had leisure for nothing else than to tell or to hear anything at all new.* It was the complaint of their own orators. When they ought to have been taking vigorous measures for the welfare or protection of their own state, still the love of news predominated over every other principle, and they who should have been acting were ever talking still. There are some in every congregation to whom this reproof belongs: they spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. What will these do when the light of eternity rises upon them? when the world's news will have died out with the world, and nothing, nothing survives for them but a soul lost if not saved?

Thus then St Paul stood before that famous court of which the poets and orators of Greece tell such proud things. It does not appear to have been a formal trial. It does not seem that life or death hung upon the issue. Rather we may think of it as of a preliminary proceeding, designed to settle the question of a criminal prosecution. Something might be founded upon it: but

for the present it was a hearing only for information; only to clear up suspicions, or else to darken and fix them. Observe now the skill and the courage with which he spake. Never more clearly were the words verified, *I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.*

Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. Another and perhaps truer rendering of the words is this, *I observe that in all things ye are more religious* than others. It is a question which can never be decided, which of these two was really the Apostle's meaning. The word itself has both senses; *religious*, and *superstitious*. It seems to be more in St Paul's manner, to start from a point of agreement than from a point of variance with his hearers. He would carry them with him if he could. And he selects this one characteristic as in itself hopeful. They have evidently had a sense, and a strong sense, of a superior power. They have filled their city with recognitions and mementos of a hand above them. It is better—may we not say it? that a man should feel his dependence, and that a man should seek to be in communication with One above him, than that he should do neither. That religious instinct, if it can only be rightly guided, is far better than an utter insubordination and insolence of self-trust. Thus St Paul opens his discourse with one word of limited praise. *I observe that you are a religious race.*

For in passing through and reviewing your objects of reverence, I found also an altar on which was inscribed, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Lest after all their care, after all the multiplication of their altars and temples, any one superior being should at last have been overlooked; lest there should remain in heaven or earth or sea one deity unnamed and unhonoured in the devotions of the nation; they had adopted the singular expedient of an anonymous altar, which might at least deprecate the vengeance of a disregarded and slighted God. This altar St Paul, with a wisdom and a skill above man's, takes as the text of his sermon.

That then, that thing, that divinity, *which ye in ignorance reverence, this I announce to you.* I am come, he says, to give a name to that anonymous altar. I am come to you from an un-

known God, to enable you to fill up that blank spot in your devotions. And who then is He? Is He indeed one and but one among many objects of worship? Will one altar suffice Him, one among many, so that He shall be merely added to the *gods many and lords many* whom a heathen world worships? Listen to the sublime answer to that enquiry.

The God who made the world and all things that are in it, He being already, being originally and by the right of creation, *Lord of heaven and earth*, Sovereign and supreme Possessor of heaven and earth, as having Himself brought them into being, *dwelleth not in temples made with hands; nor by human hands is served* (*ministered to*) *as needing anything more* than is His by virtue of universal ownership, *Himself giving* continually *to all life and breath and all things; and made out of one* (person or thing) *every nation of men to dwell upon every face of the earth*, upon the earth in all its aspects, north and south and east and west; *having defined*, marked out as by exact limits, *assigned seasons* of national and individual existence, *and the limitations of their habitation.*

One God made the world. He is the Owner of the universe: how can He be limited to one spot in it? He is the Giver and Preserver of human life: how can He require material offerings, as though to support His own? He is the one Creator of all races: there is not one God of this nation and another of that: to each race He assigns the time and duration of its being, and the exact place of its habitation: and with what object? Why does He thus regulate man's being? Why does He thus keep a sovereign hand over all circumstances of human existence? What would He have men do, as the result of this Divine reign? The 27th verse gives the answer.

To seek God; if perhaps they might feel after Him, as men grope in the dark after some lost object, *and* not only feel after Him, but *find Him* too; *even though indeed He is already*, is from the first, is before they seek Him, *not far from each one of us: for in Him we live and move and exist;* it is in Him, it is in virtue of His all-including and all-embracing presence, that we exercise any power of life or motion, or possess indeed any being:

as some also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. He quotes from a Greek poet of Tarsus in Cilicia, his own native city; as though claiming for himself a new link of connection with his audience, and exercising a sort of fellow-citizenship with Greece, as before (and subsequently too) with Rome.

Being then already, being by origin, *an offspring of God, we ought not,* even for our own sakes, *to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven of a man's art and devising.* If we ourselves are, as your own poets say, God's offspring, it is derogatory even to man's nature to represent God under material and inanimate forms. Let the very dignity of man cry out against the disparagement of God.

The times then of the great *ignorance God having overlooked now sends word to men (mankind) that they should all everywhere repent; inasmuch as He set a day,* appointed it once for all in His secret counsels, *in which He is about to judge the world in righteousness in the person of a Man whom He marked out, having afforded a pledge to all by raising Him from among the dead.* There was a time, a long and dreary age, during which God seemed as it were to acquiesce in the spiritual ignorance of His creatures. He interposed not by any act of authority to cut short the season of their blindness. But now He has interposed. Now He sends through the world a call to repentance. And that call is backed by a threatening as well as a promise. There is a day of judgment. It is a fixed day, though we know it not. And that judgment will be a righteous judgment. All sin will quail before it. And that judgment will be conducted by a Man; even by One who is as truly Man as He is truly God. And the proof of His investment with the office of the Judge, is the fact of His own resurrection already accomplished.

Well can we understand that there was that in this address which was at once trifling and shocking in Grecian ears. *When they heard of a resurrection of dead men, some mocked. What?* they might say, even the more thoughtful, *give us back a body when we are at last released from it? Give us back the body which*

has clogged the pure soul, and dragged downwards the heavenly aspirations, and infected with the very leprosy of sin a nature that was akin to God's? Nay, let us hope better things than these! Tell us of a conquest of the body, tell us of a deliverance from the body, and we will listen: but not of a restoration of the body from the dust of death; not of an impossibility, and not of an injury and a torment. Others listened with a deeper attention, and said when he concluded, *We will hear thee, again also, concerning this.*

And thus, for this time, he departed from among them: he quitted the place of hearing, and mingled again as before, we doubt not, with the various groups which loitered in the gathering-places of the city.

Not in vain had he spoken even this once. One man, described as *the Areopagite*, an officer probably or assessor of the court of Areopagus, was a convert to the word spoken. He, and others also, *clave to* the Apostle, *and believed*. They were not ashamed to be in his company, even in those high places of learning and of arrogance. And not in vain certainly had St Paul spoken for all time, leaving on record for ever a glorious example of a Gospel to the heathen. Well had it been, my brethren, if the same wisdom had ever taught in the world's dark places; if a like recognition had always been made, of a Divine witness in man, a Divine seed and spark of light, waiting only the hand of Revelation to kindle it into a pure and steady flame; if, instead of trampling upon man as he is, or flinging headlong before him that *pearl of great price* of which he knows not yet the value, Christian teachers had begun by drawing from within that latent instinct, and stirring into activity that dormant conscience, by which man, however debased, however degraded, does to the end differ from the beasts that perish.

There is, my brethren, in every heart an altar with this inscription, *To the unknown God*. It is there, if there be nothing better, in you. You know that your conscience witnesses in you of God, and you know that your heart does at times cry out for Him. You know that there is no rest out of Him, and you desire, in the end if not now, to find rest in Him. My brethren,

I would help you to replace that anonymous inscription by one which Revelation has given you. I would have you know Him whom as yet you know not. Know Him first as the author and sustainer of being, as the assigner of your place and of your time, as around you and with you everywhere, as so near to you, in His own holy presence, that in Him you actually *live and move and have your being.* Feel after Him even thus: send forth after Him the cry of your voice and the hand of your soul, and be assured that He is always more ready to hear than you to pray. But stop not with the God of Nature: go on to think of Him as the God of judgment, and go on to think of Him as the God and Father of that Saviour who is to be the Judge. Seek Him through Jesus Christ; and be well assured that He who is near to you as the God of your life is nearer still to you as the God of your soul and as the God of your salvation.

The times of ignorance God no longer winks at: the Sun of righteousness has risen upon us, and whosoever will may have in Him the light of life. *We beseech you* in His name *that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*

LECTURE II.

CHRIST'S SECRET ONES.

ACTS XVIII. 10.

I have much people in this city.

THE *city* here spoken of was Corinth. We have read of the Gospel at Athens: tonight we are to hear of it at Corinth. The two places were not many miles distant: but they were very different. Athens was the seat of learning: Corinth was the centre of business, of commerce, and of government. Athens was a city of loungers; a place of indolent curiosity and of leisurely speculation. Corinth was a city of men of business, a meeting-place of nations: its two ports fronted the one towards Asia, the other towards Europe; and it was as if the two worlds met there and trafficked. Corinth was also a city of great luxury and of notorious vice. *To play the Corinthian* was a proverbial expression for being a man of pleasure, addicted to dissipation and debauchery.

These few strokes may suffice to set Corinth before us sufficiently for the present purpose. Such was the change involved in those first words of the chapter, *After these things Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth.*

My brethren, the Gospel is for all nations, and of none. It is equally suitable and equally unsuitable to all sorts and conditions of men. It would be hard to say which natural disposition most dislikes it; the pride of philosophy, the worldliness of

business, or the frivolity of pleasure. And yet for each one of these it has a message, and to each one of these it has a mission. Each one wants it; each one is unconsciously athirst for it; and to each one it conveys that gracious call which is the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ to the nations, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.* Blessed be God, everywhere some listen, even if everywhere more refuse.

We will first briefly recount the few marked incidents of this first stay at Corinth.

St Paul arrived there alone. Silas and Timotheus, left at Berœa, had not yet (it appears) rejoined him. We know how this was. Though at first he had sent word to them *to come to him with all speed*, yet on reflection he had desired one at least of the two to revisit Thessalonica before he did so. He *thought it good to be left at Athens alone*, and sent Timotheus back to the Thessalonians to *establish them and to comfort them concerning their faith.* Some suppose that Timotheus had actually rejoined him, and was sent back to Thessalonica from Athens: others, and perhaps more correctly, that it was by a message sent from Athens that he was instructed thus to proceed.

The result was the same. St Paul was again a stranger in a strange city. What Christian companionship was to him, and what the desolateness of Christian isolation, we know well from his writings: our Lord Himself sent His disciples not one by one, but *two and two, before His face*, and even divine faith needs for its fullest enjoyment the interchange of human love.

The Providence of God, ever caring for those that are cast down, found for him a new friend. An edict of the Emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome. This iniquitous act was overruled for good in at least one instance. A Jew named Aquila, *of Pontus by family*, but resident (for purposes of business) in Rome, had arrived at Corinth with his wife Priscilla, and was there engaged in the business of tent-making; preparing, that is, tents for travellers in the East, out of that coarse cloth of goats' hair, for which St Paul's own country, Cilicia, was famous. Now St Paul himself, according to the wise and pious

custom of his age and country, had been taught this trade. He was a learned man, brought up under the best and most celebrated of masters, and certainly (we must conclude) of no indigent family: yet he had been taught a trade: the reverses of life are many; the accidents of foreign travel, in those days as in these, manifold and diverse; and it was thought no disparagement to the social position of a young Israelite, to be acquainted with a manual trade, and thus enabled to support himself, if need were, by the labour of his own hands. What a blessing it is, my friends—let me say, my young friends, more especially—to have an honest calling! No wise man will teach you to be ashamed of being able, if it be necessary, to support yourselves. O the misery which grows in this world out of idleness! out of compulsory idleness oftentimes! A man would work, and cannot get work to do. See that this misery be not your own fault; the result of a foolish pride, refusing to learn a business. If it come in the way of Providence, it must be borne, like other trials: but indeed, I believe, it is one of the hardest and most disconsolate of all.

St Paul entered this populous and busy city: and what could he have done, if he had not been able to support himself? There were in those days no 'livings' as we call them: an Apostle had no maintenance but what he worked for: and how could he have hoped to gain acceptance for his Gospel in a strange and unbelieving city, if he had had to begin by asking men to feed and clothe and lodge him? if he had had to begin by asserting his claim to a free subsistence, and thus by disparaging the disinterestedness of his own motives? He must be an honest man before he could be a religious man: he must be able to supply his wants, before he could preach to other men of the necessities of their souls. Therefore he took up his abode with Aquila, and worked with his own hands at the trade of tent-making.

And yet no one, my brethren, has more strongly asserted than St Paul, the right of a Christian minister to *live of the Gospel*. Every thing in its own place and time. In a nation already calling itself Christian, and recognizing therefore the work and the

position of a Christian ministry, it is right that men should be set free from manual labour for a higher and (let me say) a far more responsible and a far more difficult and arduous service. But St Paul himself, labouring for Christ in a world still rejecting and blaspheming Him, would not *use these things*, lest any should say that he was idle, or lest any should say that he was mercenary. *He abode with them, and wrought: for by their trade they were tent-makers.*

On the Sabbath all work was laid aside: and on that sacred day, week by week, amidst the scoffs and jeers of a heathen populace surrounding them, the Jews of Corinth, as the Jews wherever scattered, entered the place of worship, to read the Law and the Prophets, and to address their worship to the God of Israel. Thither St Paul too bent his steps; and there he *discoursed in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded* (*sought to persuade*) *both Jews, and* any *Greeks* who worshipped with them.

At last Silas and Timotheus arrived from Macedonia. Till now St Paul had been heavy in heart on account of those beloved congregations which he had left behind him there in an enemy's land. How heavy in heart we know from himself; from his 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians. And how much relieved and lightened in heart now, we know also from himself; from the same Epistle. A weight was taken off from his spirit which few of us have ever felt; that weight which rests upon the soul of a Christian while he *stands in doubt* of some one whose salvation is dear to him as his own. Now therefore we read in the 5th verse that *Paul was pressed* or *constrained by the word:* his zeal was a positive pain to him: it was as though he felt the word of God within urging and compelling him to give it utterance: exactly according to those well-known expressions of righteous men and prophets of old, *I am full of words; the spirit within me constraineth me:* and again, *I am pained at my very heart, I cannot hold my peace: His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.* The relief of his anxiety about the Macedonian churches left him free to give all his thought to

the wicked and idolatrous people around him. He was *straitened* in himself, he was actually pained and coerced, by that zeal to preach Christ which could no longer be held in.

When he found that the Jews as a body were obstinately set against the truth, he followed his Master's rule, and, with a sign expressive of a deep sense of their danger, turned from them to the Gentiles. He had done what he could: life was short, eternity at hand: his work must be done, his commission must be discharged: they who will not *hear* must at last be left to *forbear*. He selected a new place of meeting. There was a proselyte named Justus, himself now a convert to the Gospel, whose house was contiguous to the synagogue. Thither St Paul transferred his conferences with such as would listen. And now a great work began. Crispus, *the ruler* (or presiding minister) *of the* Jewish *synagogue*, now became a convert. A great effort it must have cost him; but it was made: he too joined the little company in the house of Justus; and we learn from the 1st chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians that he was one of two or three persons whom St Paul baptized at Corinth with his own hands. *Many* now *of the Corinthians heard, believed, and were baptized.* It is often so. The coldest hour is the last before the dawn: just when all is opposition, obloquy, and indifference, a new impulse is given, we know not from whence—and yet we do know—and a great interest is awakened where before all was torpor, darkness and death.

And St Paul was not left in any doubt as to the presence of a higher help than man's. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself spoke to him in a night-vision, and said, *Be not afraid, but speak on, and be not silent: because I am with thee, and no one shall set on thee to hurt thee, because I have much people in this city.* Thus cheered and emboldened, *he continued* there *a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

The appointment of a new Roman Governor, Gallio by name, was the signal for a more decisive outbreak. Gallio is one of those men whose character we can read by two lights; the light of man, and the light of God. He was brother to a famous

Roman moralist, and uncle to a famous Roman poet. The former of these describes him as a man of remarkable sweetness of disposition and great popularity. These gifts, attractive as they are, have often been serious snares: and they were so in this instance. An amiable person is often weak in principle: he cannot stand alone: he cannot do or say a strong thing, even where duty is most clear and imperative. And a popular person cannot bear to risk that favour: if he must take a side, he will be found on that of the multitude, and not on the side of God. Such was Gallio. His very virtues were weaknesses. If he refrained from doing wrong, it was rather to save himself trouble than to obey conscience or to please God. And often a man of this character awakens the hopes of the wicked, even where he does not gratify them. That easy, good-tempered, compliant person, surely (men say) we can make a tool of him; he has not the resolution to resist us: and thus he invites wrongdoing, and multiplies around himself those circumstances of difficulty to which he is most unequal. The character of Gallio tempted the Jews of Corinth to drag Paul before his judgment-seat. Theirs was a tolerated religion; and they would place him outside that pale. His, they said, was an illicit offshoot from Judaism: the Empire which protected them was bound to punish him. For once the very indifference of Gallio was of service. He saw an escape for himself out of an embarrassing position. The charge was out of his jurisdiction. If it were an act of crime or wickedness, of which he was asked to take cognizance, it would have been only reasonable that he should bear with the tediousness of the investigation. But if, as he now perceives, or thinks he perceives, the question is one of mere doctrine, of names and terms, of a Law purely Jewish, tolerated by the Empire, but not adopted or recognized; if this be all, they must see to it themselves: he does not choose to be a judge of such matters. So he drove them from the judgment-seat, and turned to matters more important or less wearisome. He must get through the day's business, and then turn to pleasure. The proceeding had a singular corollary. The mob, always unfriendly to Jews, and generally showing a sort of

rude sympathy with the falsely accused, seized upon Sosthenes, the ruler (or one of the rulers) of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat; in retaliation, it should seem, for his part in the frivolous charge against another. The name of Sosthenes occurs in the 1st verse of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, as the name of a Christian brother uniting with St Paul in that communication to the Church of Corinth: whether the person spoken of in the Acts afterwards became a convert, or whether a different person is intended, we know not, and must submit to doubt.

The narrative, thus far pursued, of St Paul's first sojourn at Corinth, has suggested one or two reflections which must suffice for this evening.

1. Let us take fully into view the character of Gallio. Like Demas, the lover of this world; like Diotrephes, the lover of pre-eminence in the Church; like Agrippa, the half-persuaded to be a Christian; Gallio has become a byword of the Gospel, as the type of the indifferent and the let-alone bystander, who, whether this doctrine be true or false, whether this conduct be right or wrong, whether this soul perish or be saved, *cares for none of these things*. We have just touched, in passing, upon the mischief done by such characters to others and to themselves. They tempt men to tempt them. They encourage hopes in the wicked, even where some conflicting yet still unworthy motive—such as the love of ease or the dread of inconvenience—prevents them at last from satisfying them. But what shall we say of the character itself? What shall we say of one who, in a world of sin and suffering, lives on frivolous and indifferent? of one who is never roused by human distress or by human danger to any higher feeling than that which is altogether of self and of earth and of time and sense? Is it possible to conceive of any character more exactly opposite to the one perfection which is set before us in Christ Jesus? O where should we have been, the best of us, if that had been the mind of God? if it had been enough for Him to *dwell in the high and holy place*, caring for none of those things which were happening and to happen upon

His earth below? Is there indeed any sign of evil more decisive than that light, that indifferent, that trifling or else scoffing spirit, which nothing can arouse either to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, or to *weep* the tears of sincerity *with them that weep?* And is not this too much the characteristic of our own age, of our own world? What is the popular literature of the day, but a light and ludicrous portraiture of human life? What spark is there amongst us either of a generous enthusiasm or a noble indignation? Alas, we have spent long before maturity every impulse of a warm-hearted sympathy; we have adopted a jesting or bantering or sneering tone, at first as an affectation of manliness; and now it has grown upon us into a second nature. And thus the young man of this day is one who has pretended not to *care for any of these things*, until the care itself is smothered and at last eradicated within. O for the entrance of that life-giving Word which corrects the selfishness of nature and kindles the fire of Divine grace! Then at last, then only, will men learn what true greatness and what true honour is. Then does the dignity of the Roman magistrate, with the lictors, and the fasces, and the curule chair, and the jurisdiction of a province, and the power of life and death—yet the iron fetter within upon the soul, of a disgraceful selfishness, a deep ungodliness, an inveterate vice, or a degrading fleshly lust—grow faint and pale before the lustre of a spirit not of this world; the spirit of a devoted piety, and the spirit of a large-hearted and a self-sacrificing humanity. These are the lessons of the school of Christ; nowhere else learned, and yet, when learned, commanding the respect and the reverence even of the world which looks on.

2. Set in contrast with Gallio St Paul himself. What a singular history! What a problem for the unbeliever! How inexplicable, in all its bearings, save on one hypothesis; that the Gospel is true! What an epitome is his life of all Christian experience, in its lights and shades! There is a man working all the day at a common manual trade. He sits close at it. To all appearance he is a man earning a livelihood; and nothing more. Day dawns upon him, and night closes; and still *these*

hands (as he once said elsewhere) are *ministering to his necessities;* working out by hard, steady, ignoble toil, the support of the body, the supply for himself of shelter and fuel, of food and clothing. That is what appears. A man might look in upon him in his humble dwelling many times in the day, and see nothing but this. And yet those very hands have wrought miracles. They have been instrumental, under God, in healing the sick, in giving sight to the blind, in casting out devils; yea, in communicating the blessed and life-giving Spirit of God. It is of these very hands that it is written, *When Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.* And those eyes which are now intently fixed on the coarse tent-cloth which he is stitching into an accommodation for desert-travellers, those eyes have often been wet with tears of repentance and of charity; even as it is written, *Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears;* and again, *Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping;* and again, *I cease not to warn every one night and day with tears:* yea, far stranger still, those very eyes have *seen Jesus Christ our Lord*, and *blinded with excess of light* were closed afterwards for three days in a darkness as profound as it was typical. And even now, even from this house of Aquila in Corinth, he is writing letters which for eighteen centuries afterwards shall be read as portions of the inspired Scripture in all the congregations of the East and of the West. His two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written at this time and under these circumstances. Therefore it is no fancy and no illusion to say that we know what he was thinking of as he wrought at that trade of tent-making. Read the two Epistles to Thessalonica: ponder the joys and sorrows, the anxieties and the reassurances, there described: mark the direct revelations of divine truth there disclosed; the prophecy of the Resurrection, of the Apostasy, of the Man of Sin, of the glorious Advent of the Lord and Saviour: and then you will understand something of that contrast and of that combination on which we are dwelling; something of that mysterious twofold life, the

outward and the inward, the bodily and the spiritual, of which he spoke himself when he said afterwards in writing to this very Church at Corinth, *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us: we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus*, His risen life, *might be made manifest in our body.*

3. Finally, the passage before us presents one other Person, one other character, and one other life. Our Lord Jesus Christ, though taken up from us into heaven, is yet *not far from every one of us.* With His servant St Paul, in the solitude of a crowded city, amidst the occupations of a humble calling, amidst the distresses of an often depressed spirit, and the discouragements of an often despised and rejected ministry, Jesus Christ Himself was, always really, sometimes visibly or audibly, present, suggesting just those thoughts and offering just those consolations which he saw to be suitable to his case and need. *Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee. I have much people in this city.* Thy work here is not wasted. There are those in this city, and many of them, whom I am purposing by thy ministry to add to the congregation of such as shall be saved. Trust thy work with thy God: through clouds and storms He will clear and shape thy way: *immortal till thy work be done*, thou shalt here see much fruit of thy labour; and when the earthly day ends, still thy work shall follow thee.

I have much people in this city. They were not to be seen as yet. There was a veil over them. But they were there; and Christ could see them though man saw them not. May it be so here, and with us. May each Sunday's Services and Sermons, may each Communion and each Confirmation, be the means, in Christ's hand, of disclosing and revealing them. And even if we never know them; if their faith and love be still veiled from us; if they are known (to the end) only to One who seeth in secret; known only to Him who marks their souls' struggles,

counts up their sorrows, and puts their tears of contrition and repentance into His bottle; still may they be there! May they be amongst us, redeeming a sinful and ungodly place from the condemnation of a total apostasy from Christ. Help, every one of you, in yourselves first of all—in your own hearts, and in your own lives—to prove and to make true the saying, *I have much people in this city.* And so at last, when earth's toils and sorrows are ended, and the glorious harvest and the awful vintage have alike been gathered in, may it be given to us to rejoice together, loved and loving, in that eternal joy, in that unbroken peace, in that heavenly rest, which *remaineth for the people of God.*

LECTURE III.

TRANSMISSION OF TRUTH.

Acts xviii. 27.

Who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.

Scripture is a storehouse of character. The Word of God teaches largely by example. It shows us truth in action, principle in practice, and faith in works. And it shows us the opposite of these things. It holds up the mirror to fallen as well as to renewed nature; and exhibits ignorance, unbelief, idolatry, worldliness, and the love of sin, in its working: as though to say this to us, Choose now which you will be; this, or that: *I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; therefore choose life.*

Sometimes a single glance is afforded us, and the picture is instantly withdrawn. A man is presented, to teach us a single lesson: one phase of his character is exhibited, and the rest is veiled: the Word of God only wants him to point one moral, and then he is dismissed: as though to teach us, alike by what is given and by what is not given, how much and how little is man in God's hand; important, if God deigns to use him; insignificant, utterly insignificant, when God has done with him and let him go.

At other times a person is kept long in view. We are allowed to see him through and through, whether he be good or

whether he be evil. Saul in the Old Testament, and Paul in the New, stand as it were for days and years upon the stage of that theatre which is human life, and before that vast body of spectators which is the human family on its way to eternal life or eternal death. Gallio appears but for a moment: his slight lesson is soon taught: the man 'sweet' to his friends, the man popular with the world, the man of amiable impulses and shallow principles, stays but to show us how many, in their inmost souls, *care for none of these things;* care not for the conduct of others, care not for the happiness of others, care not for the wellbeing of others in eternity or in time; care not for God's truth or God's kingdom or God's will, but only for their own little pastimes, paltry interests, or selfish gratifications.

Gallio has left the place of judgment: we read no more of him in Scripture. But the word of God, and he who does the will of God, abide for ever. St Paul is still in view: he *stayed on* there, at Corinth, *yet many days, and* then *took his leave of the brethren, and sailed away* from Cenchreæ. How much had been done in those eighteen months! When he entered Corinth, he was alone and a stranger: his first efforts had been little successful; the Gospel made way slowly, and seemed at times on the point of being overborne and extinguished: now he leaves behind him a flourishing Church; there are those in that city whom he can call *brothers;* and he takes with him not recollections only, but associations and affections too, which will exercise an undying influence upon the fortunes of the Universal Church. Out of that stay at Corinth sprang afterwards, for all time, two precious heirlooms of Revelation; the 1st and 2nd Epistles of St Paul to the Corinthian congregation itself.

On this voyage St Paul was accompanied by his new friends, Aquila and his wife Priscilla. One little incident of the departure has occasioned much controversy. Was it St Paul himself, or was it Aquila, who had a vow upon him which came to an end at Cenchreæ? *Having shorn his head in Cenchreæ: for he had a vow.* It is impossible to decide the question absolutely; and persons will be guided in their opinion chiefly by their idea of

the probability of the case. Was it likely—and the question answers itself differently in different minds—that St Paul, on any occasion of danger by land or sea, should have made a vow to God in case of deliverance? a vow indicated, like the Nazarite's, by suffering the hair to grow uncut during its continuance, and now terminated by the sign here described? We know from the 21st chapter that St Paul did not consider such a vow wrong: he was still a Jew, and the observance of the Law, in any of its ceremonies, was not wrong for him: we can only say that the form of the sentence is ambiguous in the original, and that the word *having shorn* might be connected either with the nearer name (Aquila) or with the more remote.

Crossing the Ægean sea—a voyage of from ten to fifteen days—they reached the harbour of Ephesus. His companions were to remain there: he himself stayed only so long as to hold one conference with his Jewish countrymen on the all-important questions which engrossed his life. Interest was awakened by this one discussion; and though he was unable to remain longer on this occasion, he promised, in taking leave of his hearers, to return to them if it were the will of God. St Paul did not use that expression lightly. St Paul saw God's hand in all that befell him; and the words, *if God will*, had for him a real and a simple significance. Let us, my friends, whether we use the words or no, at least cherish the thought. Let no plan be ever formed, for a work or for a journey, but in the serious recollection that life itself is in God's hand, and that without the concurrence of His Providence we can accomplish no purpose of our hearts.

He sailed from Ephesus to Cæsarea; went from thence by land to Jerusalem, and, after *saluting the Church* there, returned to Antioch, so long the head-quarters of his ministry. Thence he started on a third Apostolical journey, beginning as before with Asia Minor, where he visited for the second time the districts of Galatia and Phrygia, *strengthening all the disciples.*

It was while St Paul was thus occupied, that a new teacher arrived at Ephesus. *A certain Jew, Apollos by name, an Alexan-*

drian by family, an eloquent (or else *a learned*) *man, came to Ephesus; being* also *a man mighty in the Scriptures. He was* already *instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught accurately the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.*

You see with what precision the state of his knowledge is described. He could teach, and he made it his business to teach, *the things of the Lord.* He had been *instructed in the way of the Lord.* We must suppose that he was not only aware that the Messiah had appeared, but was acquainted with our Saviour's earthly history, with the fact of His death, and even with the fact of His resurrection. Less than this could scarcely justify the description. He knew accurately, because he could teach accurately, the things of the Lord.

And yet, it is added, he knew only the baptism of John. He was in the state of those twelve disciples at the same place, mentioned at the beginning of the next Chapter, who, when questioned closely by St Paul, were found to have received no other baptism than that of repentance, as administered by our Lord's forerunner, John the Baptist, who could only point to the Lamb of God without being able to communicate the gifts of grace. In short, the deficiency indicated in Apollos, as in them, at the time here spoken of, was an ignorance of the true doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He, like them, *had not so much as heard whether there was any Holy Ghost;* not ignorant indeed of the name and of some of the operations of the Holy Spirit—the Psalms of David, and other parts of the Old Testament Scriptures, would have taught him that—but ignorant that the Holy Spirit had (in the Christian sense) yet been given: he had not yet heard of that full outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as the Light and the Guide and the Strength and the Comforter and the very presence of God within, which was the distinctive promise, and which is the characteristic gift, of Christ to His servants, old and young, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, in these latter days, under this Dispensation of the Gospel.

St Paul's friends, Aquila and Priscilla, were of course frequenters of the synagogue worship: and there they heard this earnest and eloquent, though as yet only half-enlightened, champion of the faith of Christ. They were struck, no doubt, alike by what he had and by what he lacked. *They took him to them, and explained to him the way of God more accurately. The way* is an expression often used in this Book for the Christian doctrine and the Christian life. In both of these, Apollos, with all his gifts and with all his zeal, was a mere beginner. *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.* And though Apollos was a sincere man, and an earnest man, and a bold and fearless preacher of the truth so far as he yet knew it, still, not knowing that Baptism of the Holy Ghost which alone brings a man into Christ and Christ into him, he not only had much to learn, but (in a very important respect) he was *in darkness even until now.* They therefore, this husband and wife, these two private Christians, took him to them, eminent as he was in comparison with them, and powerful in the Scriptures, and probably admired and followed already for his eloquence; they took him to them—received him with great kindness, with all regard and even reverence for what he was, and with a longing wish to see him that which as yet he was not—and set out before him, in conversation, with all patience and loving persuasiveness, that part of *the way of God*, of the truth of Christ and the life of a Christian, which till now he knew not. His heart was right with God; and therefore he was a humble as well as honest learner. That which he knew not God now taught him. And soon he was equipped for the prosecution of his ministry in regions beyond. *When he wished to cross into Achaia*, that province of which Corinth was the capital, *the brethren*, that is, the Christians at Ephesus, *encouraged him* to do so, *and wrote to the disciples* in Achaia, and particularly at Corinth, *to receive him. And when he arrived* there, *he helped much* (*contributed much to*) *those who had believed through the grace* of God: *for he vigorously confuted the Jews publicly, showing by means of the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. We have*

found Him, he might say to them, *of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.* Thus were the words fulfilled, which St Paul wrote afterwards from Ephesus to the Church at Corinth, *I planted, Apollos watered; and God gave the increase.*

And what if there were some in that Church of Corinth, who sought to separate what God had joined, and to set up him who planted and him who watered as heads of rival and conflicting sects; one saying, *I am of Paul*, and another, *I am of Apollos?* yet did no such antagonism divide the hearts of these good men from each other: the very same Epistle tells us in its last chapter how St Paul, instead of grudging to Apollos his influence at Corinth, was urging him to return thither; and how Apollos, instead of courting opportunities of extending and cementing that influence, was the one to abstain of his own free will from giving scope to its exercise. *As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.*

And now let us turn to ourselves, and enquire what we may learn from the brief narrative thus presented.

1. First, we are struck by the illustration here given of the Providence of God over human lives. Here are persons, born in the most remote regions of the world, separated from each other by every variety of circumstance, yet brought together, in the changes and chances of this mortal life, to affect one another in the deepest sense of all, and with reference to the very highest interests. Take only these three persons; Aquila, Apollos, and St Paul. One from Rome, one from Alexandria, and one from Tarsus. Europe, Africa, and Asia, each contributes an element to this combination. Can we doubt, when we consider how much hung upon that conjunction, not for themselves only, but for generations and ages to come, that it was, in a true, in a real sense, of God? God, who *can do nothing certainly except He do all things really*, arranges the various movements and associations of human life, making all conduce to our discipline, to our trial,

to our improvement (if we will have it so) and our sanctification, or else (if we will not have it so) to our self-exposure, humiliation, and fall. If we at all knew the momentous interests involved in every human life; the worth of the soul, the certainty of the judgment, and the awfulness of eternity; or if we at all knew, on the other hand, the weight of that influence which association with others exercises, for good or evil, upon the state of the soul, and consequently upon its final destiny; we should not hesitate to ascribe to God a Providence in these matters as minute as it is absolute; we should love to trace that Providence in the lives of others, we should love to acknowledge and to give thanks for it in our own.

2. Again, we are reminded, in the passage before us, of the progress which there is and ought to be in every Christian life from a less to a greater measure both of light and grace. Our condition on earth is not a stationary but a growing life. There is no such thing, with reference to any part of our being, as a standing still. To stand still is to go backwards. Most of all is this so in the things of God. It is a terrible sign when we are satisfied where we are in the spiritual life. We have all, the wisest of us, much to learn. We have all, the best of us, much to attain. It was so with that good man of whom the text speaks. Apollos was already *mighty in the Scriptures* when he came to Ephesus. Already he was able to *teach accurately the things of the Lord.* And yet he was ignorant at that time of one whole department, the deepest and the most vital, of Christian truth. He knew nothing then of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. If he had not been open to instruction, if he had thought himself too wise to learn, if he had said or thought that, being already a teacher, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, it was not for him to receive help from others, yes, even from a Christian woman, you see how ill it would have been for him: he would have lived and died only half a Christian. Yes, there is a progress for all of us still, however far we have already journeyed, or however great may be our attainments in the Church and school of Christ.

3. But a third remark is, that, though we have all of us still much to learn and much to attain in the Christian life, we must earnestly use that which we have already received. We do not yet know all that we shall know, nor are we yet all that we shall be. But that is no reason for keeping to ourselves, or for hiding under a bushel, the light we have. It is in using that we acquire. It is in standing fast that we go forward. It was by teaching in the synagogue what he already knew of Christ, that Apollos put himself in the way of those who could teach him more. A sense of deficiency is no excuse for idleness. Nor is a consciousness of imperfection any plea for reserve and concealment as to those Christian convictions which God has already implanted in us. It is *to him that hath*—and the context of that verse shows us that the meaning is, to him that useth that which he hath—that *more is given.*

4. Again, the passage before us teaches a serious and surely an encouraging lesson to more advanced Christians as to the proper treatment of persons in a less mature or a less enlightened condition. You observe how Aquila and Priscilla felt and acted towards Apollos. They heard him utter in the synagogue what they must have felt to be a most imperfect doctrine. They saw that there was not only an omission, but what they regarded as a most important, a fatal, omission, in his public teaching. He *had not so much as heard*, evidently, *whether there was any Holy Ghost* yet given. And we all know how many Christians in our day would have behaved towards a teaching thus defective. They would have gone home to criticize, to deplore, or to condemn. They would have stamped the man at once as a teacher of error, or at least no teacher of the truth. They would have deserted at once the ministry of that man, and sought out for themselves one more enlightened, more in accordance with their own convictions, or (as they might justly have said) more profitable to their own souls. Not so did those good Christians of whom we read here. Recognizing to the full the natural gifts and the spiritual graces of this new teacher, and yet deeply feeling the serious deficiencies of his knowledge and of his doctrine, they sought him out carefully

in private, gave him their confidence and accepted his, and in calm serious conversation laid before him those deeper mysteries of Christian truth which were the life of their souls, and which they desired to make also the life of his. I am sure, my brethren, that the word has a lesson for these times, and for us who are here assembled. We ought to be ever on the watch for opportunities of leading onward those who are now behindhand in the doctrine or in the life of Christ. Instead of shrinking as we too often do from close personal communication with others upon the things of the soul and of eternity, we ought to make it our business to seek it. There are those who are longing for it; those who are sadly complaining that Christians, true Christians, are always ready to talk of anything but of the one thing; those who greatly miss, and deeply deplore the want of, that real and effectual sympathy which only heart can give to heart in the daily difficulties and struggles of a Christian life on earth. And instead of pronouncing such or such a person a man of defective or erroneous opinion in the things of Christ, and there leaving him; instead of considering it a sufficient reason for avoiding close contact with him, that we see him or imagine him to be at present destitute of some integral portion of that truth which is our own stay and comfort; we ought to think how differently Aquila and Priscilla dealt with Apollos, and how richly rewarded was that self-denying patience with which they sought to lead him onward into the clear light and full happiness in which they were already dwelling and walking.

5. I will add yet another application of the subject. How simply does the office of a Christian towards others—whether it be the office of a Christian pastor, or of a Christian layman, or of a Christian woman—resolve itself into a work of helping! We read of Apollos, that, when he had been more fully instructed in Christian doctrine by the kind agency of these two Christian people, and had himself, at the entreaty of those who knew his great gifts, passed on into Achaia to minister to the Church of Corinth, he *helped much*, by the grace given to him, *them which had believed.* It is a beautiful and instructive expression. How much is in-

volved in it! What an idea does it convey of the obstacles which a Christian has to encounter! There are great rocks in our path, threatening to obstruct our progress, and too heavy oftentimes for our unaided strength to roll out of the way. What a real assistance, in such cases, may another hand afford us; the helping hand of a fellow-Christian who has known and faced and surmounted the same difficulty himself. And how intricate sometimes is the choice of paths, as we thread the labyrinth of life! What a real assistance, in many cases, may the voice of a friend afford us, if he can say, *I have tried many of these paths, but this is the right one: do not follow that; it will lead you into a morass: do not follow that; it will lose you on the dark mountains: take this: this is the way, walk thou in it.* And how heavy sometimes is the weight which we have to carry; how it oppresses our frame, how it bows down the back, how it makes us faint and cry out for weariness as we totter along the way! What a real assistance, at such times, is the offer of a Christian friend to share the weight with us; to relieve us by his brotherly sympathy, and thus to fulfil the law of Christ. And how arduous sometimes is the work which has to be done! What a multitude of separate duties, no one of which can safely be neglected, does the opening of a new day sometimes unfold to us! how unequal sometimes is the strength, bodily, mental, or spiritual, to cope with all these! And then what a real assistance it is, if some known and tried voice will offer to divide them with us; will say, *I think I can do this for you: let me go here for you or go there; and between us, perhaps, we can accomplish that to which, alone, you are unequal.* And how difficult, sometimes, is the discernment of truth! how puzzling the adjustment—for a thoughtful mind, bent upon truth and impatient of darkness—of the conflicting elements of Scripture doctrine! how painful to be obliged to say, *It is too hard for me: I must give it up: all is confusion: there is no light!* What a real assistance, at such times, may be the voice, in public or in private, of the well-instructed and the sympathizing teacher, who can bring into the dark chamber the lamp of discernment and of revelation, unravel the tangled web, draw harmony out of discord,

reconcile the jarring elements, and justify the ways of God to men.

Yes, in all senses, the office of Christians towards each other is a work of helping. If they are not there to do it, there is a Holy Spirit who can work alone. But it is their business to be there. It is the business of each one of us to help another. O, if we looked with a Christian's eye upon the scene around us; if we rightly understood the momentous issues of life and death contingent upon earthly existence; if we really felt what ignorance is, what temptation is, what sin is, in itself and in its consequences; if we could at all put ourselves in another's place, and feel everything as we should feel it if it affected ourselves; how great a difference would be made in our thoughts, in our words, and in our conduct. What a definite purpose would be given to our now desultory life. What a tender interest should we feel in distresses and dangers which we now pass by unregarded. What a privilege should we think it to be permitted, much more to be commanded, much more still to be specially commissioned, to give help one to another. What zeal would be given to our efforts for the relief of pain and sorrow, for the communication of knowledge, for the cure of sin. Let the words sound in our ears, until at last God plants them in our hearts, *My work on earth, whatever I am in station, is a work of helping: and it is the same work which Christ Himself, which the Holy Spirit Himself, came and comes to perform.*

Happy are we, if any one can call us, even as St Paul called those two persons of whom we have spoken, his *helpers in Christ Jesus;* if there be any one upon earth, who owes to us the removal of one obstacle, or the lightening of one burden; much more, his conversion from error and the saving of his soul; his first and decisive *turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*

LECTURE IV.

THE GOSPEL TEST.

Acts xix. 2.

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?

A SEARCHING question, my friends! God grant that it may press upon us as it ought.

It was first put by an Apostle; and we must see what it meant on his lips.

St Paul, after a circuit through the congregations of Galatia and Phrygia, briefly mentioned in the preceding chapter, at last reached Ephesus. He had promised this visit, and was received (we cannot doubt) with expectation and with respect. Two friends were there awaiting him, Aquila and Priscilla. They had been preparing his way by private influence: and in one instance at least, they had been permitted to equip a faithful soldier for the army of the Lord Jesus Christ. Very probably St Paul at Ephesus, as before at Corinth, *abode with them and wrought.* He reminds the Ephesian Elders, in his address to them subsequently at Miletus, that *his own hands* had *ministered to his necessities* during that prolonged abode in their city of which we are to read the beginning tonight.

But it is upon his ministry, not upon his circumstances, that our eyes are now to be fixed. How did that ministry begin? What was the nucleus of that community, to which and of which

such excellent things are spoken in the great Epistle to the Ephesians?

St Paul was (in the best of all senses) a 'waiter upon Providence.' He did not rush into a city with a ready-made lecture or sermon, and deliver it amidst scoffing and mocking crowds in the chief place of concourse. When he reached a new scene of labour, he thoughtfully surveyed the opportunities which it afforded to his Gospel. Was there any family, or any body of persons, in that place, prepared in any degree for its reception? Who was there who already believed in the one true God? Who was there already in possession of that inspired Scripture, which, even in its earlier and darker half, is *able* by God's grace *to make men wise unto salvation?* To that house, or to that community, he first applied himself. Jesus, he said, had come from that God; Jesus, he said, had fulfilled that Scripture: He was the promised Saviour, the expected Redeemer: they were looking for Him, and He was come: *by such signs—of power and of wisdom and of holiness, of words above man's and works above man's, of a life such as man never lived, and then of a victory over that grave which is the end of all living—by these things he proved Himself to be man's hope and man's rest and man's satisfaction, strength and life: and I, I who speak unto you, am His witness: I have seen Him alive after death: I have seen Him, and He has spoken to me, and He has sent me.* That was St Paul's method wherever he found himself. His object was not to create a nine days' wonder, but to lay a solid foundation for a real and abiding superstructure; a foundation of unassailable truth, and a superstructure of unassailable faith. To him twelve men, really convinced and thoroughly changed, were worth whole crowds of surprised and amazed and admiring auditors, who came to wonder and departed to forget.

The Church of Ephesus was founded on this principle. Twelve men formed its nucleus. And we are told exactly in what state St Paul found them, and exactly how he dealt with them.

They were already *disciples.* They used the name of Jesus:

they not only knew of a Messiah, but they believed that the Messiah was come. Here then all was prepared for the Apostle's teaching. Here was more than a synagogue; more than the possession of the Old Testament Scriptures: what lacked they yet?

He came among them with a single question; and it was the question of the text. *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* or more precisely, *Did ye receive the Holy Spirit after believing?* Did ye, after coming to faith in Christ, receive that outpouring of His Holy Spirit which is the sign and seal of His chosen? That was the question. It was a very definite question. It referred to a gift which could not come without their knowing it. And it referred to a gift which ought to have come, not only in a marked way, but at a certain particular time; as we shall see presently.

The answer was as plain as the question. They said, *We have not so much as heard*, or, *We did not even hear*, we were not even told, when we first believed in Jesus Christ, *whether there be any Holy Ghost.*

Now it was impossible for any reader even of the Old Testament Scriptures to be ignorant of the existence of the Holy Spirit of God. The very second verse of the Bible speaks of Him. Creation itself presupposed and demanded Him. Darkness rested upon the chaotic deep, till *the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*, and brought discrimination, order, and beauty, out of the formless and shapeless and lifeless mass. And the devotions of holy men of old recognized more than the mere existence of God's Holy Spirit. It was the prayer of the Psalmist, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me: Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy holy Spirit from me: Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit:* and again, *Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God: Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.* All that is good in man has ever been the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore these disciples at Ephesus could not literally mean that they did not

know, that they had not even heard, whether there was any such Person as the Holy Spirit. What they say is, *We did not even hear, when we believed, whether there is such a thing, in the Gospel sense of the words, as the Holy Spirit;* whether, that is, the great promise of God to the Church, as conveyed by His Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel—the promise of a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church of the Messiah—is yet accomplished and fulfilled.

If any doubt could otherwise have rested upon the meaning of this question and its answer, it will be removed by a reference to the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to St John; where, after the record of our Lord's great proclamation at the Feast of Tabernacles, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink: he that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his inward part,* from his innermost being, *shall flow forth rivers of living water;* the Evangelist adds, *But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him were to receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet* given, *because that Jesus was not yet glorified.* The word *given*, you will observe, is in italics: it is no part of the original text: it is added for the sake of explanation. The original is just as here; *for the Spirit was not yet*—or, *for not yet was there*, in the distinctive Gospel sense of the words, *a Spirit—because Jesus was not yet glorified.* The great promise, of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church and in the days of the Messiah, was not yet fulfilled; even as our Lord Himself said, *It is expedient for you that I go away; for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but, if I depart, I will send Him unto you.* The Holy Ghost was not yet come, because Christ was not yet gone.

Even so it is here. These disciples at Ephesus had not yet heard of the great day of Pentecost. They had heard of Jesus; of His ministry, of His death, probably of His resurrection. They believed in Him as the Saviour: but they had not yet heard of the fulfilment of His great promise of the Holy Spirit to be the Light and Strength and Life of His people.

Not to have heard this proved them to be ignorant of the

very elements of Christian truth. *Unto what then were ye baptized?* Christian Baptism is a Baptism *into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.* Christian Baptism is the appointed way of admission into that Church in which, as its very chiefest possession, the Holy Spirit dwells, for the participation and use of each one of its members. *Into what then were ye baptized*, if you have not so much as heard whether there be any such Holy Spirit?

The answer explained all. They had only received the Baptism of John; that is, of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ; of him who pointed to Jesus as He walked, and said, *Behold the Lamb of God;* but who stood himself outside the gate of Christ's Church, insomuch that it was said of him, *Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven*, in the Gospel Church, *is greater*, in privilege and in possession, *than he*, the greatest of the prophets. This Baptism was a Baptism of repentance, and a Baptism of preparation. It spoke of sin and defilement; it spoke and prophesied of cleansing; it bade all men prepare themselves for His coming who was the very Paschal Lamb, the actual Light of the world, the Redeemer and Saviour of Israel and of man. But it was designed only as a temporary and a preliminary ordinance; inasmuch as after it came a Baptism not of water only but of fire; not of repentance only and reformation, but of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost.

When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and, as the sign of His inward grace—a sign needed then, but now withdrawn—*they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And they were, in all, about twelve men.* Thus were fulfilled in them those words afterwards addressed to the same Church from a Roman prison, *In whom* (*Christ*) *also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise; who is the earnest of our inheritance, unto* (*to secure*) *the* actual *redemption*, by resurrection, *of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.*

I have sought, my brethren, to explain honestly the original sense and application of the text, as spoken to the twelve Ephesian disciples. They were not ignorant of the name or of the influence of God's Holy Spirit in that sense in which He is the Author of all good in the hearts of men. What they were ignorant of was His special communication of supernatural gifts and of distinctively Christian graces to the Gospel Church of God. It is a humiliating thing to say; but I can almost fear that this distinction itself is beyond some of us. I fear that, to make the matter at all suitable or at all intelligible to our hearts, we must disregard the difference which has now been pointed out, and say, in any sense, the very humblest of all, to those who are here present this evening in the sight of God, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* Happy if any of us can return a better answer to the enquiry than (in its literal sense) that which is here written, *We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*

The miraculous gifts of the early Church are withdrawn. Withdrawn, we believe, chiefly because they had done their work. Withdrawn, because it became Him, who doeth all things wisely as well as graciously, not to retain as wonders things which had lost their necessity as signs. They who will not hear Moses and the Prophets, Christ and His Apostles; they who will not be convinced by the experience of Christian lives and Christian deaths witnessed through eighteen long centuries of the Church's history; they who will not be awed by God's terrors, nor drawn by God's mercies, as they feel the one and the other in the course of His Providence, the workings of conscience, the revelations of His word, and the strivings of His Spirit; neither would they be persuaded, however they might be startled or stupefied, if foreign tongues were to be spoken, unlearnt, by modern Missionaries, or sudden predictions of an impending Advent were to interrupt Sunday by Sunday the utterance of the Minister or the devotions of the congregation. These miraculous gifts are gone by: and we could neither pray for their revival, nor even reproach our faithlessness with their

cessation. It is in His ordinary rather than in His extraordinary gifts that we trace the hand of God now. No man is left altogether destitute of God's gifts, who has the Spirit of repentance, of faith, and prayer. That man has a power, the greatest of all powers, with him and in him still. That man may well say that he has received even the gifts of the Holy Ghost since and because he believed. But the miraculous gifts are withdrawn.

Now as there is a gift which none of us in these days possess, so there is a gift with which all members of the Christian community are endowed, till they utterly quench and sin it away. We do believe that Christian Baptism is not in any case a mere idle form. We pray in that Service for the regenerating influence of the Holy Ghost: and though we cannot define the nature of the answer, we do believe that there is an answer; that no baptized person is exactly in the position of the unbaptized, either in point of advantage or in point of responsibility. Certain we are that God's promises are personally sealed upon him, in an ordinance of Christ's appointment: certain we are, that at least God is accessible to that person, regards him as a child of the covenant, and is ready to bestow upon him (in answer to his prayer) every one of the manifold gifts of grace.

I wish to put aside these two applications of the text; the one as impossible for any, the other as certain for all; the miraculous gifts of the Spirit as gone by, the baptismal gift of the Spirit (whatever it be) as ours without question; and thus to clear the way for the practical and most solemn enquiry, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost*, in His graces, in His individual and personal influences, in those things which all may have now and yet which not all now possess, *since ye*, ye yourselves, *came to believe?* It is in reference to these graces, most certainly, most distinctively, of all, that the words of the great Apostle were written, *Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*

I need say to no one here present, that in this respect the Holy Spirit is only where He acts; and that, where He acts, He

shows that He is acting; and that, where He shows His operation, it is by signs of a certain particular nature, written down for us (that we may all know them again) in Holy Scripture. *Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* And you are all familiar with one place in Holy Scripture, where the chief signs of the Holy Spirit's working in a man are brought together and as it were counted over. That passage is found in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians. I cannot enumerate tonight all those qualities which together are there called *the fruit of the Spirit*, and contrasted in detail with *the works of the flesh;* the signs of Divine renewing grace, with the indications of fallen and corrupt nature. I will select almost at random just three of them, to serve as heads of enquiry, when we are asked by St Paul, and by One greater still, *Have ye received—hast thou received—that Holy Spirit*, which all who believe in Christ *were to receive?*

1. *The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Are you happy?* the text says. You do not look so. Your brow is often overclouded; you seem anxious; you seem ill at ease; you are often irritable, hasty, discontented, almost quarrelsome. I know that you have an excuse for this: you say your circumstances are perplexing; trade is bad; a livelihood precarious; the sky of the future dark and lowering. St Paul might have said many things of this kind. When he begins to speak of his life, you would almost think he was *of all men most miserable:* he did not occupy a home, he had no loving wife, he had no prospect of a time of rest when, after many troubles and tossings, he might sit down in peace and expect a tranquil end. In every respect but one, I will venture to say, St Paul was worse off than you. And yet St Paul could say when he was asked, *Hast thou received the Holy Ghost? Yes, for I have joy: I am filled with joy: I am exceeding joyful: yea, I can glory in tribulations also. The fruit of the Spirit is joy.* If a man has the Spirit of Christ, in the same degree he is a happy, yes, a joyful man. My friends, do not put away from you this first test. If at first sight it is a strange one, or if you

think it one of the latest and most exceptional signs of the Spirit, still on reflection you will find it worthy of all acceptance: for could anything so recommend the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to a man living in a troublesome world, as this fact, that it offers him joy? joy at once? joy every day? joy in sorrow? The man who has knelt down to pray disconsolate and sad in heart shall not rise again, if he prays through Jesus Christ, and if he prays for the Spirit, without having felt his burden unloose itself and roll off from him; without being able to say, in some real though humble manner, *Yes, the fruit of the Spirit is joy.* And if the glory fades again; if the world comes in upon him, or sin, or the devil, and overcasts and overclouds this bright day within; at least he knows whither to come back to regain his joy: he must kneel down again, and pray again, until at last he can say, *Now I can obey the charge, Rejoice evermore, because I can understand that other charge, Pray without ceasing. The fruit of the Spirit is joy.*

2. Again, *the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. Are you kind?* Do you think of the feelings of others? most of all, of those of your own house? Do you never allow in yourself that miserable excuse, *It is only my way: I know that I am sharp and hasty and unreasonable and provoking: but it is only the manner; it is only the outside: I do not mean it?* We read again, and let us think of it, *The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.* There are other words in the list, of the same character. *The fruit of the Spirit is love... The fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering... The fruit of the Spirit is goodness... The fruit of the Spirit is meekness.* Yes, not only this passage, but every part of the Gospel, is full of this topic. And how bright would human life be, by comparison, if it also were full of this maxim, *The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.* Alas, where is the house in which some ungentle spirit is not more or less marring the general tranquillity? Even good manners, even refinement of mind, even the polish of social intercourse and high breeding, cannot succeed in doing thoroughly this work of the Holy Spirit. Other things break down somewhere: they

who are courteous to strangers are not always courteous at home: they who are agreeable to equals are not always considerate to servants: there is a want and an inconsistency somewhere in all these: it is only that power which dwells within, that Divine Spirit which touches the very spring of being, which can make gentleness uniform, make it genuine, and make it heart-deep. *The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.*

3. Finally, *the fruit of the Spirit is temperance.* It is a larger word in the original: self-control, self-command, self-mastery, self-rule. It is not one appetite only which it rules: it is all the appetites. It is not that counterfeit spurious virtue which casts out one evil spirit by the help of others, and compounds for pride and contempt and self-righteousness and utter ungodliness by deifying one single abstinence into man's sole virtue. It is the grace of self-rule. It is the power of saying *No* to inclination. It is the not being brought under the power of anything, save the law of God, save the love of Christ. It is the firm resolution, and the strength to act upon it, to do nothing and to say nothing and to think nothing which reason and conscience and revelation discountenance or disapprove. And who shall say that this too is not a fruit of the Spirit? Who has got this without being a Christian? Yes, I know there are abstemious men, and temperate men, and regular men, and moral men, without a spark of true Gospel light or love within them: but I say that even such men break down somewhere: either they are proud, or they are selfish, or they are cold, or they are unloving, or they are uncharitable: they are not men of self-control, when that word is made to include all duty and all virtue: for without godliness there is (in the Scripture sense) no such thing as temperance: he who is absolutely to rule himself must, first, be redeemed by Christ Jesus, and, secondly, possessed by the Holy Spirit. *The fruit of the Spirit is temperance*, and temperance, being interpreted, is the grace of self-control.

My friends, I commend to your earnest study the three tests briefly touched upon this evening. Ask yourselves, be not afraid

to ask yourselves, *Have I received the Holy Ghost?* Remember, the gate is not yet locked and barred against you; the gate of promise, which is the gate of prayer. Blessed for ever in the congregations be His Holy Name, who has made this, and this only, the condition of His unspeakable gift,

TO HIM THAT KNOCKETH IT SHALL BE OPENED.

LECTURE V.

THE WORD GROWING MIGHTILY.

Acts xix. 20.

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Some persons are ever on the watch for points of difference. They feel an unamiable pleasure in thinking themselves wiser or better than another: and even when they would do good, they do it chiefly by finding fault. The sense of superiority is gratified, and the honest desire to *win souls* is not in them.

How unlike him whose ministry is portrayed for us in this Book! St Paul, when he taught, ever started from some point of agreement; and when he would correct, always began with something which he could commend.

The remark is appropriate tonight. Observe his course at Ephesus. We saw him, last Sunday evening, looking round (as it were) on his entrance into the city, and arranging for himself the order of his operations. Is there any one in Ephesus who agrees with him entirely? any one whom he can live with and work with altogether as a Christian brother? Yes, there is his new friend Aquila: with him and his excellent wife he can share every feeling: perhaps here, as at Corinth, he even *abode with them and wrought.* Who next? Who goes some way, if not the whole way, with him, in religious faith and practice? Are there any persons in Ephesus already called *disciples?* Yes, there are twelve men, who know something of the way of the

Lord: to them he will first address himself, treat with them on common ground, and lead them on into the higher doctrine of Christian Baptism and of the Holy Spirit. Thus the way is made sure as far as it goes. A man who would do God's work must first see how far God has done it to his hand. If there is one who is only defective, he must not be treated as if he were outside the pale: he must be taken up where he is, and carried onward. Next, there are those who, though not believers, in the Christian sense, have yet a true knowledge and a true faith so far as God Himself is concerned. There are those who have the Old Testament Scriptures, and think that they possess in them the materials of eternal life. To their synagogue therefore, in the third place, St Paul wends his way, and for three whole months is chiefly occupied in arguing with them, out of their own Scriptures, that Jesus is Christ. *The Hope of Israel is come, and I am His messenger.* It is not until the Jews as a body have decisively taken their line, and have begun openly to calumniate the truth of Christ before the multitude, that he *departs from them and separates the disciples*, transferring his daily instructions concerning the kingdom of God to *the school of one Tyrannus;* probably a teacher of rhetoric or philosophy to the youth of Ephesus. Henceforth the Church and the synagogue are two, not one: the Jews of Ephesus, like the Jews of Jerusalem, have had their opportunity: they have not *known the time of their visitation*, and now, if they enter at all, they must enter as a remnant, enter as individuals, and enter with the crowd. For two years this continued, until the word of the Lord Jesus was preached throughout all Asia; spreading, by the ministry both of St Paul himself (it is probable) and of his immediate converts, through the whole of that portion of the western coast of Asia Minor to which the name of *Asia* (in its most limited meaning) was appropriated, and in which were now beginning to be planted those *seven Churches of Asia* to which the last revelation of the risen Saviour was communicated some years later by the beloved disciple St John.

I stop you, my friends, for a moment, at this point, to ask

your attention to two single expressions in the verses just touched upon.

The subject of St Paul's persuasions in the synagogue of Ephesus was a thing called *the kingdom of God.* It was the establishment of this kingdom; its nature, its laws, its privileges and immunities, most of all, its Sovereign and its subjects; which St Paul took for his constant text before that audience of three months' duration. *The kingdom of God.* That same kingdom for the *coming* of which we pray whenever we utter the Lord's own Prayer. *Thy kingdom come.* That kingdom of which our Lord said, It is *within you;* and St Paul himself to the Romans, It is *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* Surely no question can be more urgent for a Christian congregation than this, Am I inside that kingdom in heart as well as in form? Is God my King, in the sense of One who is within me by His Holy Spirit, working in my heart His great yet secret work of righteousness and peace and joy? If not, I may be called a Christian, but Christ's own word tells me that I am *none of His.*

And then there is another name for the thing to which St Paul called them. His opponents, the unbelieving Jews, *spake evil of that way,* more exactly, *of the way, before the multitude.* The Christian doctrine and discipline is called a way; a road, or a journey. Our Lord Himself calls it a narrow way, to be entered upon through a narrow gate. But take it as a way; a road of some kind; and your life as a journey—a journey of some kind—along it. I do not ask now what its characteristics are; steep or level, rough or smooth, short or long, easy or difficult. I only ask, Are you in a road? Are you taking a journey? Yes, I know life without Christ is a journey; a journey with circumstances, and a journey with events; a road marked by its milestones, and a road with a grave for its end. But evidently Christ's way is something more than this common one; something definite and distinctive, which only true Christians tread. In short, a Christian has not only to get through the life of this world, bearing its troubles as he may, and by slow stages reaching its close: but he has a rule to travel by; the rule of

Christ's word and Christ's will: and he has an end to make for; the recompense which Christ has promised, the rest which God has prepared in heaven for His people. Are you aware of any such difference between yourself and a person who knows only the life of this world? Are you living by any rule of Christ's, or making for any destination on the strength of Christ's promise? In this way we must try ourselves whether we are in any sense in the faith.

A singular scene now opens.

Every great city has its peculiarities. We have noticed on former occasions the characteristics of some of those cities to which the Gospel came by the hands of St Paul. We have seen how it faced the philosophers of Athens, and the merchants and voluptuaries of Corinth. Ephesus was a different place from either of these. It was an Asiatic, not a European city. It was a city with one dominant superstition, the worship of the goddess Diana; and with a host of smaller superstitions growing out of it. In particular, it was the head-quarters of magical art. All sorts of charms and incantations were devised and sold there. Amulets which were to preserve men from bodily danger, and formulas which were to ward off demoniacal fascination, constituted no unimportant part of the very trade of Ephesus. Mysterious symbols, called *Ephesian letters*, copied (I believe) from inscriptions on various parts of the great tutelary idol, were purchased and carried about as a safeguard to the possessor from perils ghostly and bodily. 'The study of these symbols was an elaborate science: and books, both numerous and costly, were compiled by its professors.'

Here then was a new field for the operations of the Gospel. When Moses was confronted with the magicians of Egypt, he first beat them on their own ground, and then led the way where they could not even pretend to follow. Up to a certain point we read that *the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments;* imitated and rivalled his wonders: at last they endeavoured, *but they could not;* and *then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God.* It was somewhat thus with the sorcerers of

Ephesus. A credulous age was caught by their pretences: the world was full of vagabond exorcists: every eye was turned to prodigies and their interpretation: the natural consequence, at all times, of the loss of that true spiritual communication which is with God only. Generals, statesmen, and kings, of that generation, might have used the language of Saul when he made his unholy application to the witch at Endor, *God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.* A truer art has taught us where and how alone the guiding hand can be sought and found. But to a race sunk in such superstitions it was needful that the Gospel too should assert its miraculous strength. Just as scrolls and rhymes were thought powerful against calamity, even so it pleased God to *work* in this one place *special miracles—powers*, the original language calls them, *not the ordinary—by the hands of Paul:* marvels of supernatural healing, wrought, without word or even presence, by means of *handkerchiefs or aprons brought from his body.* Just as *the hem of our Lord's garment* was on one occasion the medium of conveying a medicinal virtue to a distressed and suffering woman; so here also the instrument of healing was not a voice or a hand, not even, as we read in the 5th chapter, *the shadow* of an Apostle *passing by;* but clothes brought from his body, the application of which gave health to the sick, and deliverance to the possessed.

And why not? *God wrought by the hands of Paul:* when God works, who shall let? If He works by means, if He works without means, if He works against means; alike in every case He works with wisdom, works with authority, and works with success. Let us not cavil, but adore. Let us learn, and not judge. *He hath done all things well.*

It was natural that imposture should try its hand at a work so remarkable. Evidently *the name of the Lord Jesus* was St Paul's one charm. St Paul never left it in doubt whence his power came: it was God's power, not his: it was used in Christ's name, not his own. Thus some of the *vagabond Jewish exorcists*—some of

those professed wonder-workers who wandered about the cities of Asia, making a trade of their sorcery in the pretended dispossession of evil spirits—*attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul proclaims.* They tried the effect of this all-powerful name, when uttered by their own unbelieving lips. My friends, it is playing with edge-tools to preach a Gospel—still more, to try practical experiments with a Gospel—which we ourselves do not believe. It was so with these Jews. One particular family, of seven brothers, sons of a person described as *a Jewish chief priest* —that is, we may suppose, the principal Jewish priest residing at Ephesus —is mentioned as having attempted this spurious exorcism. But on one occasion, when two of them were using the sacred name over a man possessed, they were answered in awful tones by the evil spirit itself, *Jesus I know, and Paul I know: but who are ye?* The possessed man, with the united strength of a madman and a demon, flung himself upon the two brothers, and drove them from the house *naked and wounded.* The rumour of this defeat spread through Ephesus; carrying with it the assurance that this was no new superstition added to the already crowded wonder-market of Ephesus, but a serious and superhuman power which it was alike fatal to counterfeit and impossible to resist. And where persons who had already been brought to believe the Gospel had still continued, even as Christians, to practise the unlawful arts of sorcery, they now came forward, under the impression of this terrible event, confessing their deeds, and making a public renunciation of a traffic to which till then they had clung. And not only was this the case with the converts of Ephesus: *many of those who had practised curious (magical) arts brought their books together*—the scrolls upon which the mysterious characters were inscribed—*and burned them before all men*, in recantation of a lucrative but (as it was now seen) unlawful profession; and when they attempted to make a computation of the value of the mysteries thus sacrificed, they found that it amounted to no less than *fifty thousand pieces of silver;* something more than two thousand pounds of our money.

So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed. It was not a mere skulking creeping progress; it was not a mere gradual acceptance, by one and another, of a religion commending itself to the hearts and minds of men: it was, for once, a *mighty*—the word expresses almost a forcible and victorious—growth of the Word: a great battle had been fought, between the power of truth and the power of error, and the saying had been verified once again to the very senses of men, *Great is truth, and shall prevail.*

The passage on which we have dwelt is singular, as well as interesting. It seems to inculcate one or two lessons, applicable to all time, and appropriate to this time and to this occasion.

1. The Word of God, my friends, never tells us that there is no power and no subtlety in the devil and his agents. On the contrary, we are prepared to find much craft, and much worldly wisdom, and much marvel, and much strength too, in the spiritual powers of darkness. *The man in whom the evil spirit is* may be a very strong man; he can *overcome and prevail against* other men: there is but one stronger, even Jesus Christ Himself, and the man in whom the Spirit of Christ is. The revelation of the Man of Sin, as predicted in the 2nd chapter of the 2nd Epistle to the Thessalonians, is expressly said to be made *amidst all power and signs and lying wonders*, as well as *with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish.* Never look, for a test of God's working, to mere power or to mere wisdom. There is a third element in God's triple seal; and if that be lacking, the other two come not from God, but from God's enemy; and that third part of the seal is goodness; holiness, likeness to God Himself in His moral nature. Your eye may be caught, in this nineteenth century, by many a dazzling meteor of wonder and sign: science itself has its miracles, and designing men will persuade you that those miracles are just as great and just as divine as any that first or last authenticated the Gospel: tell them, my friends, in answer, that such arguments are beside the mark for two reasons; (1) because the wonders of science, be they never so marvellous, come to attest nothing; are not wrought by One professing to come from God with a revelation, and appealing to

them as the proof of His mission; (2) because they are accompanied by no such attributes, in the doer, of words above man's wisdom, and a life above man's holiness, as could alone complete the triple seal, or prove anything decisively as to their Divine origin. The Gospel brings all signs of God's working; not one only, nor two. Its wonders are not powers only, nor prodigies, nor miracles: they are signs: they point to God's hand, and they summon to God's footstool.

2. *Jesus I know, and Paul I know: but who are ye?* So speaks the evil spirit to those who would counterfeit against him the authority of Jesus. A terrible rebuke, my friends, in all time, to those who presume to intrude themselves into Christ's ministry without His faith and without His commission! Some persons would turn the whole force of the warning against unauthorized or self-constituted teachers; against those who take to themselves the office of the ministry without being lawfully ordained to it in this our established Church of England. And no man can value more than I do the sense of rightful Ordination; the feeling that I neither sent myself, nor took to myself this office, but was appointed, *according to the due order of this realm, to the ministry of the Church.* It gives a man great strength, if he knows how to use it, to be a lawfully ordained man: he may well thank God for it and take courage. But I dare not make this the whole, or indeed the chief part, of the lesson to be drawn from this terrible example. A man had better be a self-ordained man with faith, than the most orderly of ministers without faith. A man wants, for the due discharge of his ministry, something more than a parchment title: Satan and his evil spirits do not flee before that: they can consent to it, and give it place, and yet hold their own in the very teeth of it. Sincerity, earnestness, zeal —faith in Christ, hope towards God, love to man for Christ's sake—these are the indispensable conditions of a successful ministry: these ought ye to have, and not to leave the other out. Let us be sure that we ourselves are rid of Satan's possession; let us see to it that we ourselves not only use the name but possess the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling and working

within: and then the badge of our commission will be a reality and a strength: no retort will paralyze our efforts, and no traitor in the camp of the heart turn our own weapon against ourselves. *Jesus I know, and Paul I know:* and ye, even ye, in a later and a colder and a more scoffing age, may yet be treading in those sacred footsteps, and recognized, on earth and in heaven, as *ministers by whom men believe.*

3. We read here of certain persons, who, though they already believed, had not yet, not until now, *confessed and shown their deeds.* In that great city of Ephesus—if we rightly read the sacred record—there were for a time men who worshipped God through Christ, men who came together to break bread with the faithful, men who shared in the privileges of the Gospel and professed to be bound by its laws; but who yet practised their curious arts; still carried on in secret the sale of their superstitious scrolls, and made what was for them an unlawful gain out of the credulity, the ignorance, and even the vice, of their neighbours. It was not until a very startling occurrence broke in upon their security, that they came forward to say what they had all this time been doing in secret. When they did come to thorough repentance, then they showed it by denouncing publicly their illicit practices, and burning publicly their superstitious books. They lost money by this, but they gained comfort. It cost them more than two thousand pounds: money which was thrown (as we say) into the kennel, and which might have procured endless enjoyment for them and theirs: money which (some would say) it was a sin to waste, for it might have been even used to God's glory. They judged otherwise. They saw that a critical time had come; a time when a man must take his line, and be altogether what he is to be at all. Therefore the first thing to be done was confession; and the second thing to be done was conflagration; the destruction, root and branch, of the cherished but forbidden thing. My friends, have we yet, all of us, done likewise? Is there anything in our hands or in our homes—any practice in our shop or our office—which we should not like the congregation to see? anything (to come closer still in our enquiry) in our hearts or in our lives,

however secret, which we should blush for man to know, and which we cannot but be aware that God does know? Young men, have you all (literally) burnt your bad books? Have you nothing concealed or locked up, which can minister only to lascivious and lustful thought? Yes, the precepts of the Word of God, even in its less obvious parts, are very clear and practical: and sometimes it is the very unexpectedness of the admonition, its occurrence in a place where we thought there was nothing but history and narrative, which makes it so impressive and so startling. Count not the cost: be it in money, or be it in feeling; be it in pain, or be it in difficulty, or be it even in shame; *come, and confess, and show your deeds:* then go and burn your books: part for ever with the bad habit or the unlawful gain: and then, then at last, then with a humble heart and a quiet conscience, *then come and offer your gift.*

4. *So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.* Yes, if the Word has sometimes its level and uneventful seasons; its years, and its quarters of centuries, of stillness or even of stagnation in a place or in a Church; it has also, blessed be God, from time to time, its resuscitations and its triumphs. For a while it lurks in corners and in secret homes; carrying on, even there, its beneficent work, in hearts penetrated and purified, tempers corrected and mortified, and duties of life gently and unobtrusively fulfilled. Even there, even then, the Gospel has its beauty and its glory: it is still God's witness, it is still God's presence and God's power below. But these are not precisely what the text speaks of. It tells rather of shoots and starts made by the Word; of battles openly fought, and victories unmistakeably won. At its darkest moments the Church has seen a rekindled light: some new champion has caught up the soiled and trampled banner, and sprung forward to plant it on the topmost battlement of the enemy. Then a host of men leap from their lethargy, and a revival and reformation of religion spreads through a land and a generation. Those are critical and responsible times; times indeed of God's visitation, when *he who is not with Christ* is felt and seen to *be against Him.* How is it

with us? how is it at this moment in this town? Is there anything to be called a kindling of the torch of truth amongst us? Is there any *shaking* amidst *the dry bones in the valley?* any rising and returning to *the Father of our spirits*, in deep repentance, and in earnest purpose of amendment of life? May it be so! *It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life:* and the life spoken of is the life of an endless age.

LECTURE VI.

THE LUCRATIVE CRAFT.

Acts xix. 25.

Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

St Paul was an Apostle and an Evangelist: he was not a Pastor and Teacher. He was the wise Architect, who made the plan of the great building, saw its foundations strongly laid, and visited the work now and then in its progress: but he did not with his own hands shape the separate stones, or fit them into their exact place in the spiritual temple. It was not in many places that he stayed so much as a year: to Thessalonica he gave but a few weeks, to Corinth a year and six months, to Ephesus from two to three years. He was in the hands of God in all these things. Where God opened a door, he entered: while the door stood open, he stayed. But, with a world for his diocese, he could not become the resident minister of any one city.

Thus, after almost unexampled successes, the time drew on for his quitting Ephesus. His immediate object was a second visitation of the congregations of Macedonia and Achaia; including no doubt among these Philippi and Thessalonica, Berœa and Corinth. His further view extended to the mother Church of Jerusalem; and beyond that again, in the remote distance, to the metropolis of the world, Rome itself.

His preparation for this new circuit was the sending on before him of two of his companions, Timotheus and Erastus. One special object of their mission, though not here mentioned, was

the forwarding of a charitable collection for the poor Christians of Jerusalem among the Churches of Macedonia and Achaia. We shall hear more of this hereafter.

To give time for their operations, and doubtless to complete his own work at Ephesus, he remained himself for a time in Asia. In his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, written about this period, he says, *I must tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost: for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.*

It was in this interval, after the departure of two of his more intimate associates, that an event occurred to which St Luke devotes the remaining verses of the chapter.

There arose at that time, he says, *no small stir about the way. The way* is the Gospel. The road in which Jesus Christ teaches us to go. The Christian's itinerary, or guide of the road, through earth to heaven. We have read in this book of many such *stirs about the way.* At Jerusalem, at Philippi, at Corinth—wherever the Gospel came—it roused into fierce opposition some element or other of the fallen nature. It might be vice, it might be superstition, it might be the pride of reason, it might be the prejudice of a bigoted religion. In this instance it was a very definite, a very powerful, though a very low and base motive; the mere love of gain; the selfishness of a sordid cupidity.

There was a magnificent temple in Ephesus, which ranked as one of the wonders of the world. A former structure on the same site had been burnt to the ground, by a noticeable coincidence, during the birth-night of Alexander the Great. It had been rebuilt with extraordinary splendour: we read of its hundred and twenty-seven lofty columns, each one the gift of a king: the Ephesian ladies had given their jewels to its restoration: Alexander himself was not permitted—so jealous was the pride of the place—to inscribe his name upon the temple, though he would have purchased the honour at the price of all the spoils of the East. We who know what a fine church may be to a town can imagine in some faint degree what a temple like theirs must have been to the Ephesians.

A heathen temple had of course its deity. Inside the temple

of Ephesus, placed in its shrine and veiled by a curtain, stood a celebrated image, saved from the conflagration of the former building, and believed to have originally fallen from the sky. It was not the graceful figure of the classical Diana, goddess of archery and of hunting, which was here represented as the object of worship: it was rather the shapeless form of an Indian idol, contrasting strangely by its wooden material with the magnificence around, and exhibiting in repulsive imagery the genial influences of an all-sustaining Nature. Yet this rude and (to our conception) hideous object was the centre and rallying-point of all that was sacred in the associations of Ephesus. And superstition in Ephesus had also, as elsewhere, yet more than elsewhere, its mercantile value. There was a whole trade, and a thriving one, supported by Diana of the Ephesians. Small models of the temple, and of its presiding deity, were manufactured in precious or commoner metals, and sold to residents and visitors, as at once sacred mementos and infallible charms. These are the *silver shrines of Diana* spoken of in this passage. Out of this apparently incongruous cause sprang the tumult which seems at one time to have threatened the very life of St Paul.

A silversmith named Demetrius, employing a large number of artisans in this lucrative trade, called together his workmen and other interested persons, to direct their attention to that new influence which was beginning to undermine the very foundations of their system. He briefly reminded them—eloquence is not wanted where there is self-interest ready to be inflamed—how they derived all their wealth from this traffic in shrines, this manufactory of idols; and how *this Paul* had already perverted large numbers, not in Ephesus only, but throughout all that *Asia* of which Ephesus was the capital, into a disbelief of the national religion, *saying that they are no gods which are made with hands*. My friends, the paradoxes of one age are the axioms of another. We can almost smile at the credulity which could suppose otherwise; which could even imagine a silver shrine or a silver idol to be in any sense a

god. Let us be thankful that we live in other days and under other influences; and let us pray God, every one of us, that we may be enlightened to see our own delusions in the form of other idols, which, if they be not embodied to us in the shape of images or temples, are only on that very account the more insidious and the more dangerous.

It is a strong testimony to the extent of St Paul's influence at Ephesus, that this master-manufacturer should thus describe the perils to be apprehended from his Gospel. *Not only is this our trade in danger of coming into disgrace*, of being exposed as a mere idolatrous superstition; *but also the temple of the great goddess Diana* is in danger *of being despised, and she* herself *of being destined to be put down from her magnificence whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.*

So much had the religion of an obscure Jewish peasant (as men speak) already effected, its enemies themselves being judges.

It was easy to kindle into excitement a prepared audience. The hint of pecuniary loss will turn a reasonable man into a madman. *When they heard* these sayings, *they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.* It was a relief to them to remind themselves and one another of the majesty of their idol, and to pledge themselves yet again in express terms to the maintenance of its supremacy.

The excitement soon spread from the workshop of Demetrius through the whole city. It is astonishing how crowds collect in a great city: one man fixing a steady gaze upon a single object, no matter how common or how insignificant, has been known to fill in a few moments a whole street or square with sympathetic gazers: how much more when a cry runs through a population of some slight done to their honour, or some injury impending over their trade or their merchandise.

The theatre was the gathering-place of the mob of Ephesus: soon that spacious area was thronged in every part, and the stone seats, rising tier above tier, in ample circumference, were everywhere crowded with excited spectators. They had hurried along with them, in their rush towards the theatre, two of St

Paul's remaining companions: he himself would have been with them, to take his share in the danger, and to seize the opportunity (should it be afforded him) of a word for his Master, but for the earnest remonstrances of his friends, amongst whom were not only the Christian converts, but also some of the *Asiarchs*, or presidents of the sacred games of Asia, who possessed under that title a high place among the influential men of the city and the province. The assembly was one of those tumultuous gatherings, only to be described in the words of the sacred historian himself: *Some cried one thing, and some another; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.* Such is the contagion of excitement. An electric spark runs through a whole multitude: they have one pulse, one feeling, for the moment one soul: and yet, if you ask any one why he is there, he cannot tell.

The Jewish population of Ephesus seem to have been anxious to set themselves right with this tumultuous assembly. They knew that the Christians were too often regarded as a mere sect of the Jews: at all events they too were by profession and practice foes to idolatry: a tumult roused against one body might turn against another: it was desirable that they should explain, and that they should repudiate, as they might. They put Alexander forward; (was it perhaps that *Alexander the coppersmith*, of whom St Paul speaks, writing to Ephesus in the 2nd Epistle to Timothy?) and Alexander would have defended himself and his countrymen from the imputation of complicity with the Gospel. But when the audience recognized him as a Jew, and therefore an enemy to their goddess, they refused to hear his defence, and, catching up the cry of Demetrius's workmen, could only ejaculate for the space of two hours, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians.*

There was one sensible man in office amongst them, and he gained a hearing at length for the counsels of reason. He reminded his audience first of all that no one could possibly be ignorant of the identification of their great city with one celebrated faith and worship. They need not fear any shock being given to the national superstition. It was the proud title of

Ephesus, to be the *worshipper*—or, more exactly, the *temple-keeper* and *servitor*—of the great goddess Diana, and of her celebrated heaven-sent image. There was no need therefore for this vehement assertion of a notorious fact. We can almost fancy a tone of irony in the magistrate's expostulation. *No one will suspect you*, he seems to say, *of being lukewarm or indifferent to that superstition which lodges and clothes and feeds you. This being so, why this heat and rashness? Who are these culprits whom you have brought to this summary justice? Have they robbed your famous temple? Have they reviled your illustrious goddess? If Demetrius and his artisans have any injury to allege against them, there are assizes periodically held, and there is a Roman proconsul to hear and judge. If other questions, questions of order or public peace, are at issue, carry them to the lawful assembly. A tumultuous meeting of this nature not only exposes your city to censure, but may lead to a formidable interposition of the imperial power of Rome.* By such arguments, of adroit compliment mixed with cautions not to be trifled with, the experienced man of authority tranquillized and dismissed the assembly.

At first sight some of those who are here present may perceive little that is of Christian edification in the long paragraph now brought before them. We are apt to pass over the addresses of Demetrius and the Ephesian registrar, as containing no matter of self-application or instruction in righteousness. And yet, my friends, even this section of God's Word will be found to teach us something about ourselves, and something also about Him.

What a selfish being is man! How he regards everything in its bearing upon self! Demetrius does not enter into the question, What is true? or, What is right? or, What is reasonable? or, What will please God, and bring a man peace at the last? He only says, Ye know that by this trade we have our wealth, and ye see that here is an influence spreading which will gradually destroy it. Upon this one argument all proceeds. A thing which will make a man one whit poorer in the wealth of

this world must be opposed, must be put down, must be punished, whether it be true or whether it be false! And we read the argument here, and wonder at its transparent folly. Yet, my friends, *suffer the word of exhortation:* it is the duty of your ministers to hold up the glass to you, that you may see, in any respect in which it is discernible, your own likeness in the men of old time. For this purpose were the historical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament written, that they may give us types and ensamples of human character as it is in all time. So let us use them now in this instance.

Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. The words have been echoed in every age; yes, and in our own. The fallen woman, who plies her weary and wretched trade in the weakness and wickedness of man, will tell you that it is her wealth: who will employ her? but for this she will starve. And the man who lives by no honest calling; the man who makes chance and speculation his business; the man who makes gain out of other men's inexperience, and builds his house out of materials plucked from another's; will he listen to you when you speak to him of piety or charity? Will he turn a ready ear to the remonstrance which bids him think of God and think of man, think of the soul and think of eternity? Is not this, in substance, his answer to every call addressed to him by the Gospel, *Ye know that by this craft I have my wealth? A man must live: and this is my living?* And the publican who suffers men to drink themselves drunk in his house, and youths and maidens to dance there night by night till folly perfected has brought forth vice; what has he to say but that other men may afford to be scrupulous, but, as for himself, he has but a poor living, and he cannot sacrifice ought of it? *By this craft he has his wealth.* And the tradesman, who habitually gives light weight and short measure; who cares not if he be paid twice over, or paid for work not done; what is his answer to the call of conscience, when it plies him over and over with the unwelcome admonition, to *remember the end?* Is it not this? *It may be wrong, but every one does so: it may be wrong, but I cannot*

afford to be scrupulous: it may lose me heaven, but I am not rich enough, or not brave enough, or (perhaps he will say) not good enough, to sacrifice earth. And so we run on, and run upwards, from the lower to the higher ranks of our society, and we propose to each the same question, Are you quite sure that this which you are doing is lawful; lawful by the laws of man or of God? Are you quite sure that this part of your domestic gains, that this point in your professional practice, is strictly right, is perfectly honourable, is absolutely just as between man and man, is entirely pure and honest as between a man himself and his God? And we hear, over and over again, in the mutterings of self-excuse, or even in the throbbings of conscience within, the selfsame answer: and it is that of Demetrius and his craftsmen, *I know not whether it be right, but I know that it is convenient: yes, I know, and you know, that by this craft I have my wealth.*

And hence, my friends, ten thousand obliquities, which turn a man out of the straight forthright path of rectitude and virtue. It is just these unsettled, undecided, unexamined questions of right and wrong, which keep many a Bible shut, and many a knee unbent night and day before God. When shall we be persuaded that nothing can be in the long run expedient, which is not also right? that, as the God of the Bible is also the God of Providence, as the Judge of all the earth is also its Ruler, as the Lawgiver of the Church is also its Saviour and its Redeemer, it must be well with those who are on His side? He can prescribe nothing which is not for our good, and He must in the end make it to be *ill with the wicked* and to be *well with the righteous.* What a dishonour is done to God, to His holiness, to His power, to His wisdom, yea, to His love, by keeping these questions day after day out of His court; out of the sight, if it might be so, of His Omniscience; out of the cognizance, were it possible, of His law and of His judgment! We love not to talk too often of *godliness having the promise of the life that now is*—in the sense of worldly prosperity being commonly the reward of the righteous—lest we seem to be encouraging that bargaining spirit which says to God Himself,

Deal Thou well with me, and I will pay Thee my vows. But we do well to treasure up instances, which must be familiar to all of us, of a visible and material blessing vouchsafed to a youth of innocence and to a manhood of self-sacrifice. I love to recall the image of one who in his youth, in a house of business in a great commercial town of England, being called upon to violate what he felt to be the sanctity of the law of the Sabbath, resigned his place and his emolument; began life afresh, casting himself only upon the promise of a faithful God; and lived to find himself the possessor of an ample fortune, which he used in every part to the honour of God and the furtherance of his Saviour's Gospel. Another man might have made the same sacrifice, and not reaped the same recompense below. God *giveth not account of His matters.* His promises are now (blessed be His Name) spiritual and heavenly, not transitory and earthly. But one thing every man will reap even below, who has the grace to give up houses or lands, prospects or emoluments, simply and honestly for the sake of doing God's will and obeying his Saviour's precepts. That one thing is a quiet conscience; the comfort and the dignity and the strength which follows inwardly upon a truly disinterested act: I call that a fulfilment of the promise of the *hundredfold now in this time:* how much more, when we take in the full significance of the words which follow, *And in the world to come eternal life.*

And have we not all seen the opposite result? Have we not all seen the man who thought only of his craft—the man who cared not how much he oppressed or neglected the poor; how much he disregarded the rule of right; how much he swerved from the path of honour undetected; how much he used, and how much he extended, inch by inch, the accommodating standard of a worldly morality in worldly business; how much he slighted God, if he could but plead custom or authority or (what he timidly and unbelievingly calls) compulsion for doing so—have we not seen that man go downhill as he went onwards? Have we not seen him grow more and more hard and cold and preoccupied, more and more unamiable and less and less loved,

more and more passed by and disregarded even in the world for which he had flung away heaven? have we not seen his old age the old age of the unhappy, and his deathbed the deathbed of the hopeless? Yes, if that man ever remembers himself then of the maxim which was his polar star in life, *This must I do, this must I keep, because by this craft alone I have my wealth;* surely, surely, he curses the day when he began to walk by it: surely he would fain exchange it, were it not now too late for him—surely he will entreat his children, with tears and prayers, to exchange it betimes—for that blessed, that golden rule of the word of eternal life, *Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right: for that*, and that only, *shall bring a man peace at the last.*

I am not the conscience-keeper of this congregation: in that matter *no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement with God for him.* But I am appointed to quicken, by the ministry of God's Holy Word, and in dependence upon God's Holy Spirit, the operation, in each bosom, of that conscience which is God's voice within. And I charge it upon each one who hears me to look well this night into his way and into his doing; to try and examine himself as to his mind and as to his conduct in the very sight of God; and to cast out of each that which he finds to be lurking there unhallowed and unblessed, by the help of a prayer, written surely, of old time, by the inspiration of the All-merciful, *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

LECTURE VII.

A PRIMITIVE SUNDAY.

Acts xx. 7.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

When a life is devoted to one work, with no side-aims or crooked motives, what a simplicity and what a dignity is given to it! If the work be but a human work, the duties of a profession, or the service of a country, a single-minded devotion to it will ensure and command respect. But if the work is God's work, if the object of life is God's glory, and if the management of life is God's direction, then its dignity becomes a sanctity, and the respect due to it passes on into reverence. Then, too, that observation of Providence which in commoner cases sometimes shocks us as superstitious becomes a truth and a reality: the accidents of such a life become signals; its openings for usefulness become Divine intimations, its sorrows a Divine discipline, its disappointments a Divine correction.

Such was the life of which we are reading. The tumult at Ephesus was not a danger only, it was a token. *The cloud was taken up from the tabernacle;* the rest was over, the journeyings must begin anew.

After the uproar was ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and exhorted (or *comforted*) *them, and then, having embraced them,*

went forth to go into Macedonia. When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another: such was the Saviour's order, and thus persecution itself became one of those signals, those Divine signals, of which we have just spoken.

The narrative is in this place singularly concise. Just ponder, my friends, the extent of journeying which these few words indicate, and the circumstances (as learned from St Paul's own letters) under which these journeys were accomplished.

He was now acting upon a resolution expressed in the 21st verse of the preceding chapter. Macedonia, Achaia, then Jerusalem, then Rome; this was the order which he had prescribed to himself for his new travels. And all came to pass: because these things had all (as it is written) been *purposed in the spirit.* But how differently, both in order and method, from that which had been designed!

The historian was not with St Paul in this part of his wanderings. And so natural, as well as so truthful, is the narrative of God's Word, that, when St Luke is not present, we have but a very brief and concise summary of the occurrences which befell his friend. But for St Paul's own writings, we should have no idea of all that was wrapped up in this one journey. Having written his first Epistle to the Church of Corinth before leaving Ephesus, with a heart full of anxiety concerning the manifold errors of doctrine and practice which had already crept into that gifted but unstable community, he hoped to have met at Troas, before he crossed into Europe, that faithful friend whom he had commissioned to bring him word again how his rebukes and remonstrances had been received and regarded at Corinth. He reached Troas, and the hand of God was with him. *A door*, as he expresses it, *was* there *opened to him of the Lord.* But his heart was too anxious to allow him to enter it. What a touch of humanity is there! The Apostle himself is too much depressed to work. Yes, my friends, a touch (we say) of humanity: but might we not say with equal truth, a touch of divinity? What was that depression? Was it one of the thousand causeless or trifling despondencies which

affect and too often paralyze our daily life? Nay, it was a sorrow about souls; the souls of others; of others unconnected with him save by official ties; an anxiety about the spiritual condition of a congregation which was no more to him than any other; a congregation too which had ill requited his love, and which many a Christian minister would have renounced almost with indifference. St Paul could not work at Troas, because he was unhappy about Corinth. He was human; grief stopped his labours: but that grief was a Christian grief; that human sympathy was itself divine.

He pressed on into Macedonia, that he might the sooner meet Titus on his return from Corinth. He did meet him in Macedonia, and his tidings were full of consolation. The Corinthians, as a Church, were penitent and obedient. There were still diseased members: but the body was sound. This was the main question. All else could wait: the Church was loyal. Under the first impression of this good report, St Paul wrote, from Macedonia, perhaps from Philippi, his second Epistle to the Corinthians. Read it afresh in this connection. Think of him, whom you have learned to know and to love from the history in the Acts, sitting down to dictate to his amanuensis those words of love and tenderness, not unmixed with tones of bold and manly severity, which lose much of their interest when they lose their key.

With equal brevity St Luke speaks of his *going through those parts;* implying, no doubt, an extended tour through the regions of Macedonia and Illyricum; many a Church revisited, and many a new Church established; and then *coming into Greece;* where, on this occasion, he *spent three months.* Nothing is said here of Corinth; nothing of that visit which was to fulfil the denunciations of his late Epistles—*I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare;* of that visit which was to be the opportunity of *setting in order* all that was irregular, and reasserting his Apostolical authority by *proofs of Christ speaking in him;* nothing of that one still surviving memorial of this particular sojourn at Corinth,

the Epistle to the Romans, for which the Universal Church has to thank God throughout its generations, and by which we may yet learn, concerning St Paul himself, what lofty meditations and what profound reasonings occupied his inner mind, while he was sojourning there in the house of Gaius, and prosecuting in the place and neighbourhood the ministry of the Gospel of Christ. The writing of this great Epistle, the chief storehouse of what is distinctively called Christian doctrine, corresponds with this 3rd verse of the chapter now before us. *He came into Greece, and there abode three months.*

It had been his purpose to sail, as before, from the port of Corinth, and without any intermediate visits to make his way direct to Syria. But his old enemies, the Jews, bent upon *filling up their sins alway* in opposition to the Word of truth, laid a plot for his destruction, which could only be baffled by an entire change of route. He therefore retraced his steps by land northwards, and found himself once more amongst his beloved friends, the Christian congregation of Philippi.

There too he rejoined his biographer St Luke, as we learn by the resumption of the first person of the pronoun in the 6th verse, after its disuse from the close of the 16th chapter. St Luke appears to have been left at Philippi when St Paul quitted it after his first visit, and not to have accompanied him again on his journeyings until the close of that other (probably his third) visit to Philippi of which we are now reading the brief record. *We sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread.* The rest of his companions had preceded them to Troas. From this point onwards we shall have the guidance of an eye-witness to the end.

One incident of the stay at Troas will furnish us with an instructive topic of meditation in the words which follow.

Seven days, in all, were spent there. The last of these was *the first day of the week;* the day on which we are now assembled for purposes of Christian instruction, prayer, and praise. Let us see what a Sunday was at Troas, in the first days of the Gospel, with St Paul for the preacher, the leader of the devotions, and the minister of the Sacrament.

And upon the first day of the week; not the Jewish Sabbath, but the day following it; *when we were gathered together to break bread*—I need not tell you what that bread was, which was thus broken as an act of worship—*Paul discoursed to them, being about to depart the next morning; and he extended the discourse up to midnight.* The dread of long Sermons had not yet fallen upon the congregations. Their hearts were full of the subject: and there was a sympathy between the preacher and the hearer, which made the time of listening pass quickly. From towards evening, until a late midnight, St Paul was still speaking to them the words of eternal life. Well can we imagine, from his recorded Sermons, and from Epistles still in our possession, what some of his topics were. How would he detail to them, first of all, the revelations which he had also received, concerning Christ crucified and Christ risen. How would he set before them one and but one object of trust; a Saviour dying for our sins, and raised again for our justification. How would he show them, again and again, the lost state of man without Christ, and the completeness of him who possesses Christ. How would he expose to them the secret workings of their own sins, and the utter futility of all human efforts, apart from Christ and from grace, to conquer or eradicate them. How would he point them to the cross of Christ for pardon, and to the Spirit of Christ for renewal and life. And then how would he draw out before them the particulars of Christian duty; beginning with its work within, in habits of earnest and life-long prayer; and passing on to its work without, in a faithful discharge of every relation, and in the fulfilment of the all-embracing, the all-explaining, the royal law, of love to God and love to man. Beyond this, how would he warn them against the thousand perils and snares which would ever beset their onward steps, and commend them, with prayers and tears, to that omnipotent grace of God which alone would keep them from falling. We who know what was St Paul's sense of the precariousness of the spiritual life in man, can trace for ourselves the outlines at least of that discourse which prefaced, through long hours, the celebration of the Holy

Communion eighteen hundred years ago in that upper room at Troas.

The whole scene is before us. The room itself is on the third story of a common dwelling-house: and from it there projects a recess or balcony over the street or court below. The night grew dark, and a number of lamps or torches illuminated the apartment where the congregation was gathered. In the recess, on a sort of window-seat—the window, or rather the shutter, open for coolness—sits a young man named Eutychus, a convert and a disciple. The heat, and the lights, and the late hour, and the long listening, bring on drowsiness: the head drops, the muscles are relaxed: gradually he sinks unnoticed, for every eye is bent upon the speaker: at last he falls through the open window—falls from the third story, and is taken up dead. In the alarm and confusion which follow, Paul himself goes down that outside staircase which commonly communicated between the balcony and the street; and then, finding life extinct, he follows the example of the Prophets of old, of Elijah and Elisha after him, and with earnest faith, and doubtless with a solemn appeal to the *God of the spirits of all flesh* to give efficacy to the act, throws himself upon the body, feels the breath come again, and announces in the name of Christ to the agitated spectators that *his life is in him:* the accident was *not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. And they brought the lad alive, and were not a little comforted.*

Let us see, I said, what a Sunday was at Troas.

1. A Sunday at Troas. What is Sunday? It is not the Jewish Sabbath; not a day of gloom and bondage, of restrictions and penalties; not a day of meritorious observance or sanctimonious austerity. Sunday is the weekly festival, as Easter is the annual festival, of our Lord's Resurrection. It is the day on which we commemorate, to ourselves, to one another, and to the world around, that greatest of all events, by which earth was ennobled and glorified, and *life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel.* Already in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Epistles of St Paul, and in the Revelation of St John, we find

this day marked with a peculiar distinction, as at once the most sacred and the most joyful. The very place of the fourth commandment, standing in the midst of moral rules, of rules forbidding idolatry, profaneness, murder, adultery, theft; commanding reverence and devotion and duty and holiness; proves conclusively that there is a moral principle involved, as well as a positive precept; proves, in other words, that man needs a periodical rest for body, mind, and soul, and that God requires of him as a sacred duty the solemn separation and the religious observance of such a periodical rest throughout his generations. The Sabbath is an ordinance of Divine humanity; an ordinance testifying of the origin in the result, of the source in the stream, of the Giver in the gift. Man's restlessness, and man's selfishness, and man's cupidity, and man's irreligion, being what they are, how should man have invented, how should man have enforced, how should man have consented to or acquiesced in, the consecration of one day in seven to a solemn rest from labour, if One greater than man had not originated and had not prescribed it? Little does the working man, and little does the poor man, know his own interest, when he secularizes and profanes the Sunday. Once destroy the sacredness of the day, and the liberty of the day will follow. Once give the impression that you have no sense of religious duty in keeping the Sunday, and, depend upon it, irreligious and unbelieving employers will soon find reasons for engrossing it, till God's gift perishes from the earth through the ingratitude of those to whom He gave it. It may not be true that the day of the Sabbath was ever expressly or formally changed from the seventh to the first: it may not be true that the day which we keep is precisely the Jewish Sabbath, or that we keep our Sunday in direct obedience to the law of Sinai: but this I say, that the moral law prescribes a day of religious rest, and that Sunday is, for us, the day so prescribed. It may be quite true that for a time both the days were kept, both the Sabbath and the Sunday, in Jewish Christian congregations; or it may be that the first Christians, in the fervour of a new devotion, needed not to keep either, seeing that

the commonest working day was to them, in those first moments of an ardent piety, all and more than all that the holiest of Sundays can ever be to us. But this I say, that to us, living where we live, and when; so circumstanced, so surrounded, so influenced, and so tempted; Sunday is practically a necessity of existence, if we are ever to win or fight our way through this world to a better. And this I say, that, as it is a necessity, so it is also a duty; that no man can neglect the Sunday and be blameless: the fourth commandment lives and speaks and enforces itself still: so long as earth is earth, and so long as man is man—so long as it is a sin to swear or to kill or to steal —so long I believe that the consecration of a portion of time, of one day in seven, to special religious purposes, will be a duty, and its desecration a sin: he who profanes the Sunday by business or by dissipation or by idle frivolity, will not be blameless; will be guilty of sin against God, will be guilty of unkindness and cruelty towards the best and highest interests of man. And he who asks the question, *Is it in the bond? is there any law of God which binds me under express penalties to keep holy the Sunday?* shows himself as incapable of entering into the spirit of the Gospel, as of estimating the blessings of God's Providence, and the claims of a far-sighted and a large-hearted philanthropy. Before the latest of the Apostles had yet exchanged earth for heaven, the day of which we speak, the day of which we are reading, the day on which we and the congregations of Christ's Church everywhere are now assembled, was known already, without ambiguity and without discussion, as the Lord's own day. *I was in the Spirit,* St John says, *on the Lord's day.*

2. And now as to the employments of this day. Sunday, we have said, is our periodical rest; enforced, in spirit at least, by the Divine Law; endeared, to us all who believe, as the standing festival of our Lord's resurrection. But it is not designed to be a day of mere inactivity. The body rests by repose: the soul rests by action. The weariness of the soul is its prohibition from its own appropriate pleasures. The weariness

of the soul consists not in over-work, but in cramping and compulsory restraint. While the body works, while the mind works, the soul is coerced and confined: it cannot turn to its subjects, it cannot rise to its home, it cannot refresh itself in its relaxations. Therefore that day of rest which the body wants for relief from labour, and which the natural mind wants for relief from labour, the soul wants rather for occupation; for that occupation which is at once its business, its food, and its repose; intercourse with God Himself; expatiation in the things of God; communion with the people of God on earth and in heaven.

i. The congregation at Troas came together, as a matter of course, on the first day of the week. They came together, no doubt, for worship. They did not forget that special promise which is attached to united prayer; to the concordant requests of even two or three persons assembled in Christ's name. My friends, I am persuaded that we need in this place to be brought back to the simplicity of common prayer. I often wonder—nay, from the experience of a fallen nature I scarcely wonder—whether indeed we are praying in common. Two things go to this: (1) that each one pray, and (2) that each one pray as one among many; pray, that is, not his own selfish prayers, but his part in the prayers of the congregation. If I do not see all kneel, if I do not see every face buried in profound seclusion, I can scarcely hope that hearts are engaged: but even where these signs are not wanting, so subtle is the spirit of evil that I can almost fear still lest there be no earnest communication with God going forward; lest the heart be running on its own little affairs of business or pleasure, and no contribution be offered from that quarter to the work which (to be worth anything) must be the work of many concurrent hearts, of many concordant and sympathizing souls. God grant that the reflection be brought home powerfully to some, What is my worship when I come hither with the congregation on this first day of the week?

ii. The Christians at Troas came together also to hear preaching. I know you will say, It would be easy to listen if

St Paul were the preacher: it is because the preacher has nothing interesting, certainly nothing new, to say to us, that we find his words wearisome and his Sermons long. Do not think, my friends, that the preacher's task is an easy one: least of all, in these days of excitement, of *itching ears*, of impatient audiences, and ever changing as well as abounding interests. A Sermon has become in these days synonymous with dulness: to preach to a person is another expression for uttering tedious commonplaces to an unlistening ear. Every newspaper has its jest at preaching: he is a bold man who enters a pulpit, knowing that his very office has become a reproach. Nevertheless there are those who believe that preaching is still, as of old, an ordinance of God; believe that the Gospel, familiar as its central truth is to us, still needs enforcement; believe that the earnest words of a faithful man have instruction in them and carry a blessing from on high after them. There are those who have found by experience that they are the better for preaching; that still, in its humbler measure, preaching, like the earlier and higher gift of prophesying, is enabled from time to time to search the hearer's heart and reveal to him its secrets, to carry light into its dark places, and bring a man to his knees before the judgment-seat and before the mercy-seat of God. The humble and earnest hearer shall not go away ashamed; nor will he go away to scoff at that instrumentality, poor though it be, because human and sinful, by which, from Sunday to Sunday, the instructions of Christ are ministered afresh to the congregation.

iii. But, besides united worship, and above listening to preaching, there was one special object of the Christian gathering at Troas. The disciples *came together to break bread*. In the first instance (if we rightly read the record of Scripture) the reception of the Lord's Supper was a daily act of the congregation. *Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house.* Long did it continue the badge and the privilege of Christians to partake of that sacred bread and that divine cup once in each week, on its first, its consecrated day.

How shall we dare to touch on this subject in a modern congregation? How many suffer months and years to slip by without one participation in that ordinance of Christian faith and love—how many, of those who most need its reproving and comforting power, of those whose lives are most suffering from the very want of this close, this personal contact with Christ! Worship may be disregarded by many: the streets of a town may be full of loiterers even while the Christian congregation is worshipping: Sermons may be disliked, despised, ridiculed: few may be deeply moved by them; many, even of those who worship, may go away to criticize or to jest at them. But even worship, even preaching, is practically honoured far above Communion: the Church may be half empty for worship, it is emptied again before Communion: a little handful, out of all the congregation, gather for that sacred feast in one corner of the building, and the bulk of the Church goes its way, bold and unabashed, before the bread and wine are uncovered upon Christ's Table. My friends, these things ought not so to be. They would not be, if one spark of living light were communicated to our souls in answer to believing prayer: they would not be, if our eyes could look onward to judgment, or upward to our Saviour's throne in heaven. Let us all pray tonight, that again amongst us, as of old, worship may become a reality, the word of God a guiding light, and Christ's Holy Supper a refreshing stay.

He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

LECTURE VIII.

A PASTORAL RETROSPECT.

Acts xx. 26, 27.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

The Sunday at Troas was ended. *Till midnight* first, then *till break of day*, Paul had *preached* and *talked* to those who grudged not the time to listen. The fall of Eutychus from the balcony on the third story, and his restoration to life by the Apostle's hands, had secured an everlasting remembrance for that farewell service. When morning dawned, the strangers departed: Gaius and Timotheus, with the rest of the Apostle's companions, including St Luke himself, leaving Troas by sea; St Paul taking the first stage of the journey in solitude and by land. Even one whose heart is in heaven needs seasons of retirement. Even one whose work is all sacred—nay, surely he most of all—needs the periodical refreshment of his own soul by converse with a Father and a Saviour in heaven. The twenty miles' walk from Troas to Assos furnished, we doubt not, such an opportunity to the holy man whose life we are studying.

Following the windings of that jagged and indented coast southwards; sometimes passing and sometimes visiting those

island and mainland towns which mythology and history have combined with nature herself in making beautiful and famous, but with an eye (we may well suppose) rather for Gospel openings than for picturesque or classic scenes; the little company at last reach Miletus, on its projecting headland opposite the mouth of the Mæander. They had passed near Ephesus, without stopping, the day before. St Paul was afraid of being tempted to stay, if he allowed himself to revisit that scene of so much toil and so much interest. He was anxious to reach Jerusalem, this year, in time for the feast of Pentecost. Last Pentecost he had been at Ephesus: at Corinth he had wintered: at Philippi he had spent his Easter: now, by exertion, he might just reach Jerusalem for Whitsuntide: and at that great gathering of his nation from all parts of the earth, in the old mother city, he might hope for work, as he knew himself to be destined to suffering, in his Master's cause. He preferred therefore to keep himself away from Ephesus, as though he could scarcely trust himself within reach of its strong attractions.

But he could not find himself thus within twenty or thirty miles of that city and its congregation without seizing the opportunity of some direct communication. He therefore sent word of his arrival to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, and requested them to come to him at Miletus to receive his parting counsels. We see thus early in the Church's history—nay, we saw it at an earlier point still—how careful a provision was made by the Apostles for the regular instruction and oversight of the Christian congregations. The institution of pastors and teachers is no modern fancy: it is a necessity of Christianity. The Gospel itself would soon die (humanly speaking) out of many hearts, if they had not these holy days, and these means of grace, these prayers and sermons and sacraments, to carry on from week to week and from year to year the work of good once begun. Despise not these things: trifle not with them: procrastinate not: they are for your life.

The passage which follows is one of the most affecting in all Scripture. It sets before us an Apostle, one who had *seen Jesus*

Christ our Lord, recapitulating his own work in a particular city. Incidentally it tells us what the true work of an Apostolic ministry is in all times and in every place. Thus it gives to the minister a touchstone of his fidelity. Is this my Gospel? Is this my object? Is this my teaching, and this my manner of life? He has to stand before his congregation, as hereafter (nay, as already) before his Master, to be compared with this standard. Terrible scrutiny! fearful ordeal! God make it less fearful, less condemning, for us, year by year!

And do not think, my friends, that the shortcomings or inconsistencies of the minister are any advantage, any cause of triumph, for the Church, for the temple of God, *which temple ye are*. If *the ministry is blamed*, it is you who suffer. If the minister is punished, it is because your blood is upon him: it is because he has dealt unfaithfully with your souls, which are still in jeopardy of their salvation. Let us then seek, God helping us, to read these words together, as persons alike and equally concerned in them: and may not your ministers, as they read, address you in that brief, that pregnant saying of the same great Apostle, *Brethren, pray for us?*

The first portion of the address will suffice for this evening. I will give it you, with some accuracy, as it stands in the original.

Ye know—ye, without my telling you *—from the first day from which I set foot in Asia*—in that small district of which you hear so often as bearing distinctively the name of Asia, the district of the seven Churches of the Book of Revelation, with Ephesus for their chief and capital—*how*, in what manner, *I was with you*, I behaved myself among you, *during the whole time.* He appeals to them, as he does elsewhere to the Thessalonians, as to the manner in which he had conducted himself during his abode amongst them: *ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*

Serving the Lord. This was the principle of his life. Doing service, a real and definite and consistent service, to the Lord Jesus Christ. What a reality is there in the expression! Does

it not set before us a living Person, the Master of a great household, the work of which, in all its several departments, may be done, and has to be done, by living men, as for Him, under His eye, according to His will, and for His glory? *Serving the Lord with all humility:* not in an arrogant, self-satisfied, self-asserting spirit, but as one full of infirmity and full of sin, who can count nothing that he does perfectly done, and who has every day to confess and bewail many an omission and many a failure in duty. *And* with *tears:* tears of repentence, and tears of sorrow; repentance for sins of my own, and sorrow over souls that will not be saved. *And* with *trials which befell me in the plots of the Jews.* St Paul was everywhere a man plotted against. His life was never safe. Again and again the Jews drove him from amongst his congregations by actual designs upon his life. At Ephesus, in particular, he mentions in the 1st chapter of his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians some tremendous danger to which he had been exposed. And in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians he uses a very strong metaphor to express the same or a similar peril, and speaks of himself as having even *fought with wild beasts at Ephesus.* Some of these things are doubtless indicated in the words now before us: *trials which befell me in the plots of the Jews.*

Ye know then, he says, *in what manner I behaved myself among you* in the midst of these trials. *How I shrank not*, drew not in, used no reserve, *as to any one of those things which were profitable, from announcing it to you and teaching you in public and at* your *homes, protesting both to Jews and Greeks*, asserting and pressing upon them with all earnestness, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus.* (1) He used no reserve: that is his first statement. He did not consider what would be palatable, or what would be popular; how far he could safely go, and where he must pause, in declarations of truth or enforcements of duty. He kept back nothing. His question was not, What will man like? but, What has God said? (2) Again, what he was in public, he was also in private. He did not satisfy himself with preaching, in the synagogue or in the school

of Tyrannus, once or twice a week, a bold and faithful doctrine: he taught also in their houses: there he expounded to the half-enlightened *the way of God more perfectly:* there he brought home to his less willing auditors truths and duties which they would fain lose sight of: there he ministered to the sick, comforted the sorrowful, and bound up the brokenhearted. *Publicly, and from house to house:* neither only; both alike, both equally. He was in earnest, not only to do his duty, but to effect a work. (3) And then, his subject. What was the sum of his teaching? We know, from his own words and writings, that it was a varied teaching. It was not the dull and monotonous repetition of a text or two of Scripture, or of a formula or two of doctrine. It was a rich and copious stream from a perennial and an exhaustless spring. But still its main purport, its direct end, what it sought and what it came to, could be put into words: and no words so full or so expressive as these, *Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* The Gospel, when it comes into a man; when it passes, in any heart, from a buzzing sound into a living voice; *changes the mind* (for that is repentance) towards God and God's enemy: makes a man hate as well as dread his own particular, his own besetting sins; and makes him desire above all things, not to pacify, but to please Him, who, notwithstanding all his sins and all his provocations, has yet had mercy upon him personally in Christ Jesus. And the same Gospel, thus apprehended, makes a man believe in Christ: *Ye believe in God; believe also in me:* makes a man say and feel, *There is such a person as Jesus Christ, who died, who rose, who lives for me:* makes a man live as in His sight, and *see Him who* at present *is invisible.* That sort of sight, that sort of life, is faith, as the other particular was repentance. The two together made up St Paul's summary of doctrine, as everywhere, so at Ephesus.

There are many persons willing enough to hear Sermons; admirers of eloquent words, forcible arguments, or lively illustrations: but, of these, a large proportion wince, and draw off, and go back, when the plain demand of repentance comes home to

them, and when the direct test of personal faith in Christ is closely and powerfully applied. Is it so with any who now hear me? Do you repent of your sins as sins against God? And do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Saviour and Redeemer and Lord?

And now, behold, I, bound in the spirit; my spirit constrained and coerced, as it were, thus to encounter all that may be before me; *am going to Jerusalem, though I know not the things which shall there meet me; except that the Holy Spirit protests to me* everywhere, *city by city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I make my life of no* such *account,* I regard not my life as so *precious to myself, as* I do *to complete* (*in comparison with completing*) *my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to protest* (*to assert earnestly*) *the Gospel of the grace of God,* the joyful tidings of the free favour of God.

And now, behold, I know that ye all, amongst whom I went about proclaiming the kingdom, shall no longer see my face. My abode amongst you is ended. Never again will you see me going about amongst you as your daily counsellor, friend, and guide. *Wherefore I protest to you this day, that I am clear from the blood of all: for I shrank not from announcing to you all the counsel of God.*

I can scarcely conceive of any one as reading these words without a sense even of alarm. For what do they say to us? Surely this. *God has a will and a purpose concerning men. He has sent us word of it in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They who receive that message, embrace God's mercy as there revealed, and walk day by day in the light of that revelation, shall be saved. They who refuse it must perish. If it be through their own rejection of the word faithfully communicated, theirs alone shall be the punishment. If the messenger himself have been unfaithful, he too must perish in their ruin.* I know these are unwelcome truths: many in this nineteenth century call them narrow and old-fashioned: but, till we get a new Bible, we must hear them in our Churches; and let us beware *lest haply,* in despising them, *we be found even to fight against God.*

We will not think of others: we have enough to do with ourselves. Let *the Judge of all the earth*, who must *do right*, deal, as His wisdom shall determine, both with the nations which have not heard of a Saviour, and with the multitudes who, in a Christian land, live as though that Saviour were not. Let us look within, not around. Tell me, my friends, how it is with you. Is it not true still of you, that *the thoughts of your hearts are revealed* (as Simeon said of old) by your treatment of Christ? that, just in proportion as you are struggling against your sins, and feeling after God, and diligent in daily duty, you are also inclined to the thought of Christ, and to the sense of His mercy, and to the desire for His salvation? and that, on the other hand, when you are careless and worldly, when you are unamiable and perverse, still more, when you are cherishing any bosom sin, then, and in the same degree, you lose all interest in the Gospel, and at last even take a positive dislike to Christ? The words are dreadful to utter: but they are no exaggerated words. The sinner, who will nurse his discontent, who will neglect duty, who will (cost what it may) keep his sins, does, by no figure of speech, feel within himself a real repugnance, a conscious hostility, to Jesus Christ. He addresses Him in the very language of the demoniac, *Let me alone: I know Thee who Thou art: come not thus to torment me before the time.* I say not how it may be in the secret closets of philosophers and learned men. I ask not how far they may be described in the language just uttered. It is not to such men that we minister in this place. If there be any of them who can reject Christ and yet love holiness; if there be any of them who find no connection between the revelation of the Gospel and the victory over sin; I can only say, their case is not ours: they need a different treatment, not of this place or time. For us, plain men, living in the haunts of common life, busied in its trades and professions, vexed by its changes and buffeted by its temptations, I am persuaded that I speak truth when I say that Christ and religion come and go together; the question lies,

for us, between carelessness and Christ, between ungodliness and Christ, between sin and Christ; lies practically thus, and, for us at least, thus only.

And therefore I say that, in our case, at all events, the alternative is as serious, as awful, as St Paul here makes it. To refuse the Gospel is to refuse life and to choose death. To trifle or to procrastinate with the Gospel is to trifle or to procrastinate with the destinies of eternity. To put aside Christ is to choose sin: and *the wages of sin is death.* It is not with the refinements of modern criticism, and it is not with the intricacies of modern science, that we are concerned here. The question of faith or unbelief is, for us at all events, the question of godliness or sin.

Now if they who are charged with the office of elders in this Church must either be *pure from the blood* or chargeable with the blood of its individual members, it must be because your blood—that *blood* which *is the life*, the life of immortal souls—is critically and fearfully involved in the vital acceptance of the Gospel. That which is for them so anxious and so personal an alternative, is only such because it is so anxious and so personal an alternative for you. They are bound to declare to you the whole counsel of God: but that is because the whole counsel of God is connected and concerned with your salvation.

O, my friends, our interests are indeed one: never let us put them asunder. Never let us speak or feel as though it were our office to say, and yours to do; or as though (on the other hand) it were our business to find you out, and yours to escape from us and elude the search. The minister and the people are more one than you think. He has all your infirmities, all your difficulties, all your temptations, and some (he often thinks) of his own besides: some infirmities, and some difficulties, and some temptations growing out of his office, and rendering his path yet more steep and narrow even than yours. He can feel with you in all the distresses which are common to man: and can you not feel, without

his saying it, that he must have others also which are all his own? Think what it must be to him to have to declare to you, on pain of death, all the counsel of God. Can you not enter into the trembling anxiety with which he has first to learn and then to unfold it? Think what it must be to him to have to speak with authority, where he feels perhaps that his proper place is that of a learner and of a novice still. Can you not enter into some of those misgivings which make his heart fail him as he rises in the congregation to speak with feeble or stammering lips to some from whom he might hope rather to hear wisdom? There is no comfort for him, and no refuge, but in the recollection, as of a strength perfected in human weakness, so also of a community of interest to be expressed in an entire sympathy. Let him feel that you are running, with him, the race of eternal life. Let him feel that your prayers ascend with his to the throne of the heavenly grace. Let him feel that it would be no pleasure to you to hear of his halting, no joy to you to think of his at last missing his crown. Let him know that you are aware of his responsibility, and that you sympathize with his anxiety. And then let him help you. *Not for that we have dominion over your faith,* writes even an Apostle, *but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.* The office of the minister is an office of helping. His life is given to the one work of aiding others, as God shall enable him, in the work of reaching heaven. If he rebukes sin, it is because sin would keep you out of heaven. If he urges faith, it is because *without faith it is impossible to please God.* If he calls to self-examination, it is because, *if we would* only *judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* If he pleads for the poor in earthly things or in spiritual, it is because thus you may *lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven,* and *find it after many days.* Thus in all things, rightly understood, the ministry of the Gospel, in its humblest offices and in the meanest hands, is a work of helping: a work in which the end and the motive and the means are all alike Christian faith, Christian trust, Christian charity,

Christian love. Surely then we should all labour together, that all may at last rest together and be at peace in God.

O that a double spirit of life and love may be poured out upon the ministers and upon the people! If the one might be endued with St Paul's spirit, the other would respond with a primitive devotion. And without it, we deeply feel, we sometimes bitterly feel, no multiplication of means of grace, no frequency of Sacraments, no iteration of doctrine private or public, can avail anything. Prayer and pains, prayer and patience, prayer and waiting, prayer and humility, and prayer again, these are God's instruments for great works below. Where these are, God is: and where God is, there is energy and there is strength. Let us not be overhasty to say, *I am pure from the blood of all men.* Where is he who has so prayed and so ministered, so entreated and so warned, so guided and so led the way, as that he shall have right to lay wholly upon his flock the bloodguiltiness of their own ruin? Rather would we ask of God such a spirit of self-abasement and of self-accusation and of self-despair, as shall drive us at last in utter helplessness to the footstool of His grace, of whom it is written, *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*

LECTURE IX.

THE COMPARATIVE BLESSEDNESS OF RECEIVING AND GIVING.

Acts xx. 35.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves—so the discourse proceeds from the point reached last Sunday—*and to all the flock, in which the Holy Ghost set you* as *overseers, to shepherd the Church of God, which He purchased by His own blood.*

Take heed to yourselves, and to the flock. Take heed, writes St Paul to his beloved Timothy, *to thyself and to the doctrine: continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.* A Christian minister must look to himself, to his own soul, first, or he cannot give heed to others. All must move, or all stand still, together: it is only by beginning at home, by beginning within, that a man can go on, effectively or even safely, to help and to save another.

The flock. How familiar a figure, yet how expressive! It is our Lord's own figure. *I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.* The flock is Christ's flock, and they who minister to it are Christ's under-shepherds. *The Holy Ghost,* St Paul says, *set them* as *overseers,* overlookers, guardians, *in* this flock. They are in it, before they are over it. They are themselves a part of the flock; and their own safety

depends, even like that of any other member of it, upon their being themselves faithful, docile, tractable followers of the one Divine Shepherd. While they are so, they may regard themselves as set where they are by the Holy Ghost Himself. His working within them stirred the desire for this ministry; and His grace, pledged to them over again at their Ordination, qualified, and qualifies them daily, for its discharge.

Their office, as here described, is that of *feeding*, or more exactly, *shepherding, the Church of God;* God's congregation, God's assembly, gathered, in any place, by the call of the Gospel, to hear, to worship, and to obey. *To shepherd the Church of God:* to guide them to the right pasture, and also to lead the way; to be to them, both by word and by example, both by life and by counsel, counsel public and private, stated and occasional, their helpers and their encouragers in *the right way that leadeth to eternal life.*

The Church of God, which He purchased by means of His own blood. Some read here, *the Church of the Lord;* afraid, perhaps, of the unwonted strength of the expression, which speaks of *God* as *purchasing the Church with His own blood.* We are not left to a single phrase or two in the Bible, to prove the glory and greatness of our Saviour, as being Very God no less truly than Very Man: we will not cling to any doubtful or ill-supported authority for the sake of propping up a doctrine which wants no such ambiguous aid: what Christ is, in His proper Divinity, we know, not from two or three passages, but from all parts, of God's Word: and if *the Lord* rather than *God* be the correct reading here, we will close with it without a misgiving. If, however, it be the case—as many thoughtful and learned men believe—that our Version is right; that it does stand in the original *the Church of God;* then we thank God for it as one added bulwark of *the faith once for all delivered to the saints;* we *thank God,* I say, for it, *and* we *take courage.*

Gather up, before we pass on, the brief yet weighty topics of this one verse. (1) *Take heed,* so the elders or pastors of Ephesus are solemnly charged by one who knew, *to yourselves.* (2) *Take*

heed to the flock: to all the flock. (3) You are *overseers in* it. Guardians, watchmen, over Christ's flock. Yet not only *over* it: *in* it first. (4) *The Holy Ghost set you* there. (5) Your business is to do for the Church what a shepherd does for his flock: to guide and to lead, to feed and to water, to watch and to protect. (6) This flock of Christ is also *God's Church:* and God Himself *purchased* that Church *with His own blood.* If this one verse were engraven on the heart of each minister, high and low, young and old, in our own Church of England, what would it not effect in the advancement of God's kingdom below?

There follows a serious warning as to approaching corruptions of the true faith. *I know that after my departing grievous wolves will enter in among you,* find their way into your office and ministry, *not sparing the flock. And* even *from among yourselves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* How soon and how gravely these prognostications of evil were fulfilled, the Epistles addressed by St Paul to Timothy at Ephesus, the Epistles of St John written probably from Ephesus, and the address of our Lord Himself to the Church of Ephesus in the Revelation of St John, bear too full and too sad a testimony. It is a terrible thing when the dangers of any Church arise from within it; when, in addition to the ordinary perils of Christian faith and Christian practice in a world still too much *lying in wickedness,* any of the Church's own teachers become unfaithful to their high trust, and help to shake the foundations of that building which they ought to be evermore adorning and strengthening. Such was the misfortune of the Church of Ephesus: is it in any sense our own?

Therefore watch. If from within, as well as from without, such dangers as these are imminent, it well becomes the pastors of the flock to be ever diligent and ever wakeful. Remember, St Paul says to them, my example. *Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.* There must be something serious in life, and something formidable in eternity, if this kind of perpetual, personal, sorrowful warning was judged necessary or reasonable by St Paul.

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you *up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified.*

There are times when we feel that nothing can support, and nothing help, and nothing strengthen or soothe, but the one thought of God Himself as a near, an ever-present, an Almighty, and an ever-gracious Friend. *I commend you to God.* I place you in God's hands. Words soon spoken, but how full of meaning at certain times! Times of great anxiety, when man has tried all, and failed; times of extreme peril, when life or fortune hangs on a thread; times of intense sorrow, when *the iron enters into the* very *soul*, and the voice of the earthly comforter sounds in our ear like an impertinence and a mockery; times, most of all, of bitter parting, when the long-tried pastor must leave his flock for ever, or when the father or the mother of a family lies on the bed of death, and sees around it a number of little children who must learn henceforth to tread the path of life and face the storms of life all alone. Then indeed the Apostle's words, *And now I commend you to God*, have a force and a reality absolutely all-sustaining.

To God, and to the word of His grace. It is not a vague trust which is thus exercised. God has spoken; spoken a word of favour and blessing to His sinful and helpless children. *I commend you to God and to the word of His grace:* that is, to God who has made a promise; to God who *will have all men to be saved;* to God who sent His Son into the world to save sinners; to God who promises His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. He is *able to build you up:* able to raise upon the good foundation the good superstructure: able at last *to give you your inheritance among all those whom He has* first *consecrated* and *sanctified.*

Such, he says, are my deepest, my truest, heart's desires. I have no selfish, no worldly aims. *Silver or gold or apparel of no man did I covet. Ye yourselves know that to my wants, and to those who were with me, these hands ministered. I showed you all things*, or rather, *In all things I gave you a pattern*, the

pattern of my own example, *how that so labouring ye ought to help the weak*, to give a helping hand to those who on any account need it, *and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how that He Himself said, Blessed is it rather to give than to receive.*

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down with them all, and prayed. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they would behold his face no more. And they escorted him to the ship.

Could any last words be more deeply impressive? Could any parting charge leave a more indelible mark upon heart and life, than this which sent back the elders of Ephesus to a life of responsibility and of self-sacrifice with the words of Christ ringing in their ears, *It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive?*

St John says at the very end of his Gospel with reference to the works of Jesus on earth—and has not the same saying a reference also to His words?—that, *if they should be written down one by one, the world itself would not hold the books written.* Enough was written, to record the great facts, to fix the leading doctrines, to indicate the main features of the Saviour's character: enough was written, to prevent the Church from being the sport of an oral tradition, necessarily losing year by year something of its precision, and encumbered year by year with more, and more yet, of human and fanciful and at last erroneous accretion: enough to inform, enough to enlighten, enough to guard and to warn and to guide: not enough to exhaust the Divine storehouse of the deeds and words, the incidents of the life and the utterances of the mind, of the Lord Jesus Christ as He dwelt and walked below.

Now the text gives us an example of these unrecorded sayings. You will not find it in the Gospels. It was one of those maxims of truth and wisdom, which our Lord's immediate followers had treasured up from His lips. Who can doubt that James and John, that Philip and Peter, had many such remi-

niscences of those three years of converse and companionship? Here is one, nowhere else recorded in Scripture, yet current doubtless everywhere in the Churches, as the expression of the Saviour's mind and the summary of His Divine example, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

We might easily picture to ourselves occasions on which these words may have dropped from His lips. They may have checked the entreaties of His disciples that He would for once think more of Himself and less of others. They may have answered some kind and friendly remonstrance when He turned aside from an untasted meal to attend to the sorrows and sicknesses which ever thronged the doors within which He rested. They may have explained on any occasion the secret of His perpetual self-sacrifice; of His multiplying food for famishing crowds, while He refused to turn one stone into bread for His own sustenance; of His turning aside from all solicitations of personal want or weariness, so long as there was within reach but one sufferer whom He could relieve, one mourner to be comforted, or one sinner to be reclaimed or saved. At any such moment, more than once (it may be) on such occasions, may have been heard these words from the lips of our Lord Jesus, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

Were they not indeed the key to His whole life? Was not this the secret of His humiliation? The superior blessedness of giving above receiving, was it not this which made Him lay aside His glory, and come down to be the Minister of the sinful, and the Saviour of the lost? And when He had thus humbled Himself, did not the same principle originate every act and prompt every motion? *It is more blessed to give than to receive:* therefore did He take upon Himself the condition of the poor man, the lonely, and the despised, not that of the rich, the prosperous, and the powerful. *It is more blessed to give than to receive:* therefore did He, the Lord of all, submit to a life in which He *had not where to lay His head;* no domestic love in which to find solace, no public pomp or show in which to display His greatness. *It is more blessed to give than to receive:* therefore

did He make Himself the servant of all, *coming not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His* very *life a ransom for many.*

How bright a light does this one expression throw upon the whole character of Jesus Christ! There have been great men upon earth who left behind them on record but one single saying; one maxim of sententious wisdom, which the world took up and made its own for ever. Suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ had been personally known to later generations but by this one brief sentence. Would it have been possible to repress the admiration which every noble and generous heart must have felt for Him? Should we not all have framed to ourselves instinctively some conception of that character which thus expressed itself, of that life which this principle must have moulded? What an intuition must He have possessed, who thus spake, into the real secret of greatness, the true dignity of man, and the essential characteristic of God.

More blessed to give than to receive? More blessed to be communicating than participating? More blessed to be constantly becoming poor, than to be perpetually growing rich? More blessed to face labour and privation and suffering, than to live in a luxurious home, surrounded by loved and loving faces, and with much good laid up in sure prospect for many years? More blessed, asks the selfish old man, *to have an empty coffer than a full one? More blessed,* asks the young man of pleasure, *to admit another than myself to the desired scene of gaiety? More blessed,* asks the calculating man of business, the successful statesman, the self-contained and self-engrossed student, *to stand aside and let others pass me in the race of gain or fame or knowledge, than to reap the fruit of my own skill or perseverance or genius in a life of what is to me enjoyment, and perhaps an immortality of repute and honour? Nay, let me hear that, however painful, the loss must be submitted to; that, though insufferable to flesh and blood, it is a condition of the kingdom; that, though every step in such a life must be a step of degradation and a step of distress, yet it must be taken, and repeated, and re-repeated, till at last painful*

use shall become (if it ever can become) a second nature: speak thus, and I can understand you: but say not that there is any happiness, any blessedness, in such a life of mortification: say not, for it is unreal language to say, that it can ever be more blessed to give than to receive. Such, my friends, is ever the true feeling of a fallen and unrenewed nature: there was an inspiration in the words before us; and till He who spake also inspires, we shall hear them still and read them as exaggerated or unmeaning words.

And yet, if *more blessed* means, in other words, more Divine, more Godlike, is not the saying at once proved true? God, who possesses all things, cannot receive: God, who upholds all things, is ever giving. To receive is to be a creature: to give is, in whatever measure it is realized, to be so far a *partaker of the Divine Nature.*

We will illustrate the saying in one or two particulars.

1. I take the commonest and most obvious of all applications. Money. Money has many uses. It purchases many pleasures. It has in itself many powers. With limitations, it can even buy knowledge. It is allowed sometimes to buy rank. It can always command, from some quarters, submission and subservience. If it cannot buy love, it can buy some substitutes for it, and many counterfeits. Therefore it is idle to say that money is not an advantage. The rich man is better off than the poor man. Not happier, necessarily; certainly not better: but better off; more fortunate; speaking of this life only. Now can we possibly say of money, these being its advantages, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive?* Few men seem to find it so. What an eagerness is there to get money anyhow! What a pleasure in finding it multiply! What an eagerness to lay by, to invest, to get good interest, to have it out on good security! What a desire, in some bosoms, to die rich; though they know that they cannot take it with them, and though they have none perhaps to leave it to! At last it becomes a passion. Scraping, and hoarding, and counting, and bequeathing, it grows at last into a business, and into an appetite, and into a disease. Every

gain is a joy, a happiness, a blessedness. It is too late perhaps then to gain an audience for the Divine saying, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

But let us try it betimes. Is there nothing in human nature which responds to it? I can fancy a very common man—a man, I mean, quite of average virtue—saying, *My chief pleasure in money is in paying it away. I rejoice in going round among my tradesmen, and feeling that I owe no man anything. I have a positive pleasure in wiping out a debt; in thinking that that man, who has served me, is the better for me; that that family derives* (*in part*) *its comfort from my custom: yes, I enjoy paying away at least as much as receiving.* This is a poor and faint image of the glorious principle of the text: but it is well to show that Christianity is not all transcendental, *far above out of our sight*, but that it seizes upon something which is in all of us till we are utterly hardened, and raises it into a region where approval at least and admiration may follow it.

But I do not believe that the hearts of this congregation, or indeed of any congregation, will ever be changed into the love of giving, save by the entrance into them of the light of the Gospel, and of the Spirit of Christ. Then they will. When once the world is seen as it is, and heaven as it is; when once we perceive that we *are not our own*, but *bought with a price;* when once the example of Christ, who left heaven for us, and the faith of Christ, who opened heaven to us, are felt by us as real motives; then we shall be *changed into the same image from glory to glory;* we shall value the wealth of this world chiefly for its power of relieving distress, healing disease, and spreading the Gospel; we shall find that, with reference to this, the lowest yet withal the most tangible of all its applications, the Saviour's saying is verified, *It is more blessed to give than to receive. Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.*

2. I pass from the basest to the highest of possessions; from money to love. There are those amongst us whose nature is

athirst for love. Life is a wilderness to them without love. If there were but one person who loved them with a disinterested and devoted affection, they feel that they should be happy. And it comes not. They are still lonely, still disconsolate, still restless, because still unloved. Or, to change the supposition, they have love, but it is not *the* love; the love which they desire, and for which they would give all. Every one loves them, except the one person. These are among the acutest of life's sorrows: they are no fancies, they are no sentimentalisms; they are the realities of life. We cannot but think that our Saviour has a word, has a voice, for these. We cannot but think that the text speaks to them, and says, Little as you may think it, *it is more blessed*, in this respect, *to give than to receive;* more blessed to love than even to be loved. Give freely of your affection, and look not for a return. Even thus did Christ. *He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.* He loved the world, and the world hated Him. It is more blessed, because it is more Godlike, to love than to be loved. To be loved is human: to love is Divine. To love, and therefore to do good; to love, and therefore to be willing to *spend and be spent, though the more abundantly I love, the less I be loved;* to love, and therefore to devote yourself, time and strength, patience and self-denial, life and death, to the service of another, *hoping*, if so it be, *for nothing again;* this is what Christ did: this is what the Master endured: and the *disciple is not greater than his Lord.*

One thing you can say even now, if you be His; that you would not exchange the lot of the unloved for the lot of the unloving. You would not part with the power to love; with that warm heart, that generous impulse, that spontaneous, unbought, uncalculating affection; even for the sake of being free from its disappointments, free from its aching voids or its rough repulses.

Purify and refine your affection, more and more, by every argument and every motive of the Gospel; wash out of it all earthly stains, burn out of it all human corruptions: and then cherish it, use it, give it, yea, lavish it: give as your Saviour

gave, without a bargain, and without an expectation, and without a repining, and without one backward look: and in the end you shall be able to echo His words, as well as to remember and to live by them, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

May He who said the words, also make them profitable. They point to a way of life which is not after the manner of men; a life of onward striving and of upward looking; a life of which the beginning alone is here, a life of which the consummation and the crown is hereafter.

Who is amongst us, capable of such aspirations? Who is amongst us, willing to wait, and tolerant of postponement? Who is amongst us, satisfied with unseen treasures, and ready to give largely for a remote, an eternal recompence? To him, to her, is that call sent, which is not for the unbelieving and the worldly, but for those who would follow Paul even as he followed Christ,

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

LECTURE X.

COURAGE AND SUBMISSION.

ACTS XXI. 13, 14.

Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

WE have passed from Ephesus to Cæsarea.

The parting from Ephesus, or rather from Miletus, had been a sad one.

A Christian, my friends, does not lose feeling, he rather gains feeling, in becoming so. He has all his old feelings, rather sharpened than blunted by the change. He feels slights from those he loves, quite as sensitively; he has the same delight in companionship, the same shrinking from separation, which were his before: nay, in all these things, there is an edge and a life which there was not before: in proportion as self has passed away, a new man has been gradually forming in him: and that new man is all love; love first to God, love then for God's sake to man.

Men do not always remember this in judging a Christian. They do not see the inward struggle by which he keeps down the rising retort or the rebellious resentment: they do not witness the secret conflict by which alone he can *keep himself from idols*, nor yet the prayer and watching by which he acquires

that self-mastery which the world (even of his friends) calls coldness. The feeling itself is still there; the feeling of natural affection, which makes loneliness still formidable, and parting still difficult.

St Paul was as natural as he was spiritual.

Twice in this paragraph we read of painful partings; partings as of a brother from brothers; nay, as of a mother resigning a beloved son to exile or to the grave.

The sea-shore at Miletus, and then the sea-shore at Tyre, was wet with tears: Christian tears; tears of intense feeling, of bitter grief, yet withal of resignation and of submission too.

This was over now. The voyage had been resumed from Miletus: Coos, with its vineyards and its purple; Rhodes, with its historic associations (past or future) and its already ruined Colossus; then the Lycian Patara, town and port and oracle of Apollo; had each in turn been reached in safety: then a tranquil and rapid run across the open sea, leaving Cyprus on the left; and Tyre, dethroned, but not yet desolated, is made a seven days' resting-place in Christian converse with its disciples.

Already in his address to the Ephesian elders, St Paul had spoken of *the Holy Ghost witnessing in every city that bonds and afflictions awaited him.* At Tyre, the disciples, speaking in the Spirit—by revelation from above—repeat this prediction. They *said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go on to Jerusalem.* The prediction was of the Spirit, the prohibition was their own. Or, if not their own, it was overruled in St Paul by a stronger intuition of duty; by a voice within, saying, *This is the way, walk thou in it,* though it be to thee, as it will be, a path of danger, suffering, and bonds. *The spirits of the prophets,* St Paul himself says, *are subject unto the prophets.* That which they spake in the Spirit he could yet judge in the Spirit, and their revelation must at last be tried and tested by his own.

How often in difficult decisions do we see the appropriateness of that comforting and most true saying, *God has many bests.* It might not have been wrong for St Paul to turn back; to desist

from his cherished purpose of visiting Jerusalem: that had been the counsel of prudence, and zeal itself might not have disowned it. But a mightier power within pressed upon him the alternative. The nobler and the bolder and (in the end) the wiser determination was to go forward. In the Spirit he overruled the Spirit, and God was with him in doing so.

Learn from this remarkable example, my friends, the duty of comparing Scripture with Scripture, Spirit with Spirit, voice with voice. God never so speaks as to overbear exertion. God never so speaks as to supersede judgment. If one voice of God seems to say this, see whether perhaps another voice does not say that: then lay them together; and by prayer and counsel at last judge between them, and act.

Thus then there was to be a second comfortless parting. The seven days were ended, at Tyre as at Troas: then the ship, waiting not an Apostle's convenience but only the *unlading of her burden*, is to pursue its course southwards: wind and tide wait not: the disciples of Tyre, *with wives and children*—that the last view of the holy man might be impressed even upon their little ones—escort him and his companions out of the city; and then on the bare sea-beach they all kneel and pray. A late traveller has almost sketched the spot for us. He speaks of *an open space* still to be seen on *the western shore* of Tyre, *between the houses and the sea*, where may still be *enjoyed, in all its luxury, the cool sea breeze, and the dashing of the surge upon the rocky shore.* That perhaps was the oratory of the parting friends: there they took leave of one another; the missionaries to *take ship*, the residents to *return home again.* These are among the touches of real life, which make the Acts of the Apostles a picture of the true human Church for ever.

Landing at the next port, Ptolemais or Acre—so famous in English story, both in the wars of the Crusaders, and in a struggle more recent and more gigantic still—St Paul and his company went on, probably by land, a distance of some thirty or forty miles, to the great city of Cæsarea.

Cæsarea was a magnificent but a shortlived city. Its great-

ness was due to king Herod, who rebuilt it in remarkable splendour, in the short period of twelve years, as a memorial of his gratitude to the then Cæsar. Under him it became, for all civil and military purposes, the capital of Palestine. We have heard of it as the abode of the centurion Cornelius. In that city the gates of the kingdom were first flung open to us Gentiles. Here the younger Herod, in the very amphitheatre of his father's city, was stricken by the Angel *because he gave not God the glory.* We shall read of Cæsarea again in St Paul's onward history. Here he was tried before Felix: here he recounted the tale of his life before Festus and Agrippa: here for two years he was imprisoned: hence he sailed in bonds, for shipwreck, and for Rome. Now, and for centuries past, Cæsarea is not. An old castle marks its site. Its ruins spread around: a few vessels of the country still water there: but the high road itself has deserted it, and few travellers turn aside to see what was once so great and must ever for Christians be so sacred. The period of Cæsarea's grandeur is almost exactly bounded by the limits of the sacred story.

It was not with Cornelius that St Paul stayed on this occasion in Cæsarea. In the changes and chances of a soldier's life, Cornelius may have been ordered elsewhere: we know not. But there was a remarkable person to receive him; *Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the seven.* The reference is obviously to him of whom we read in the 6th chapter as one of the seven persons chosen to assist the Apostles in the daily ministration; and again in the 8th chapter—after being for the time lost in the greater fame of Stephen—as the Evangelist of Samaria itself, and as executing a more deeply affecting ministry to the Ethiopian nobleman. We owe, for all time, to this Philip, that interpretation of the 53rd chapter of the prophet Isaiah, which may God give grace to His Church ever to believe and ever to preach.

You will remember that at the close of that narrative Philip is left where we now find him. *Passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.* Whether he remained there at that time, we know not. Whether he exercised a

diligent ministry in the towns and villages of Palestine, only making Cæsarea his head-quarters, we know not. Whether his office was a permanent or a temporary one; whether in other words the Ordination described in the 6th chapter was the establishment of an order of ministry, or only an expedient, sanctioned by Divine wisdom, for the time then present; all this we know not. Here, at all events, we find him, years later, occupying a house in Cæsarea—*we entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist*—and surrounded by a family. It is especially mentioned, though without any incident to be explained by it, that Philip had four virgin daughters endowed with the gift of prophecy. Thus was literally fulfilled the saying of the prophet Joel, *It shall come to pass in the last days, that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh;* no longer upon a favoured few, in whose light alone others can see light, but upon persons of every age and rank and name; *and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.*

New omens of danger followed. Agabus, that Prophet of whom we read in the 11th chapter as predicting the famine, now arrived in Cæsarea from Jerusalem, and by a speaking sign intimated to St Paul that he would not only be imprisoned by the Jews, but (which was perhaps a new feature in the case) *delivered* by them, like his Master, *into the hands of Gentiles.* So express a declaration of coming trouble could not but aggravate the earnestness of all who loved him, to prevent his prosecuting his journey. *When we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.* The text gives us first St Paul's answer, and then the pious acquiescence of the disciples in a sorrow which they foresaw but could not prevent.

Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? The original text is clearer. *What do ye weeping and breaking my heart?* What are you about, in thus afflicting me by your entreaties and your tears? *For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when (since) he would not be persuaded, we ceased,*

we held our peace, *after saying* this only, *The will of the Lord be done.*

Let not the twofold example be lost upon us: (1) the example of his courage, (2) the example of their submission.

1. Courage is, in some senses, a natural gift. I do not suppose that a man by any effort of the will can make himself out of a constitutionally timid a physically brave man. Men differ beyond limit in their sensibility to pain. Great men—men whose career was singularly bold as politicians or statesmen—have been found incapable of bearing an operation: they have died with a wound unprobed. It was not cowardice: it was a nervous temperament of singular sensibility. There have been soldiers who lacked physical courage: they have had to lash themselves to a battle by the bare sense of duty or by the less noble yet not contemptible dread of disgrace. We ought to respect tenfold a man who has triumphed over such obstacles. He may have mistaken his calling: but that man's bravery was worth all the hardihood of those who knew what it cost and could laugh at him. If there be a choice, I respect even more the man who recanted his true creed to avoid the fire, and then in the death which at last he faced held his right hand separately in the flame as though to punish its weakness, than the readier and more instant resolution of his brave fellow-martyrs, who at once sealed their faith with their blood and *rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame* for truth.

Courage in a physical sense is a gift. I say not that even in this sense it may not be gained, or almost gained, by resolute training. But to the very end men must differ, and differ widely, in the facility or the difficulty of endurance. God gives, and God gives not: *what hast thou*, the bravest of us, *which thou didst not receive?*

But I do not know that St Paul's courage was of this nature. The few hints which reach us seem rather to point an opposite way. Was he not describing some real characteristic, when he wrote to the Corinthians, *I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling?* I picture him to myself as of a

feeble rather than a herculean frame; as a man whom men would call timid, nervous, shrinking, sensitive, rather than as one who overawed by his presence or struck terror by his speech. And yet when was ever a courage more courageous? When did St Paul ever shrink from danger? When did he ever avoid a place because it was full of enemies? When did he ever decline a duty, whether of word or action, because it might bring risk to position or liberty, to life or limb? What a catalogue is that which he gives us of physical endurances in the 11th chapter of the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians! *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one: thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* If St Paul was not made for courage, at least he had learned it.

And how learned it? The secret is told in a few words of the text.

We have all heard of the strength which a weak woman will put forth in saving a loved child from flood or fire; of the bravery with which a wife will encounter perils for a husband, when his life is threatened or his honour jeopardied. Such examples are not instances of changes of character: but they show the force of circumstances in raising character above its common level. Yet suppose now that this transforming cause were constant in its operation: would that love which has wrought wonders under sudden impulse be less powerful, think you, if the demand upon it were repeated, were perpetual? Love is stronger than death, stronger than the fear of death, stronger than the present sense of any pain however depressing or however agonizing. Just such was that motive which St Paul here indicates—that motive of which his life was the result—when he speaks of being ready to be bound and ready to die *for the name*

of the Lord Jesus. The love of Christ constrained him. Above the pain of any isolation, of any torture, of any execution, towered high aloft the name, that is, the revelation, the character, the person, of Him who while he was yet a sinner had died for him and risen; of Him who had once spoken to him from heaven, and taken him by an act of free compassion for His messenger and His witness. It was this which raised him out of himself, and made it easier to him to suffer, easier (if need be) even to die, than once to forget or forsake or deny the Person who was dearer to him than the very life itself. This was the spring of Paul's courage; and it carried him through the toils and pains and sorrows of a life which he could only describe, in his own strong way, as a daily death.

There must be something in a Gospel which can thus work: something, let me rather say, in a Saviour who can thus perfect strength in weakness.

We are not called, in these calm easy days, to feats of bodily courage in that Saviour's service. It is well. We might find ourselves all unequal to such enterprises. I know not where there is to be found amongst us one equal to an Apostle's life or a martyr's death. The courage to which we are called is known rather as a moral courage. It is that independence, of judgment and action, which befits one who must stand at last alone to give account of himself to God. It is the power to avow now what we shall feel then; to be now what we shall wish to have been then. And where is it? Where, amongst us, is that ability to stand alone, to face (if it be necessary) an adverse world, in the name and for the love of the Lord Jesus? Alas! in this aspect the brave are cowards, the strong weak, and the great little. We had rather *follow a multitude to do evil*, than bear a taunting reproach or a disdainful smile. Life therefore is a perpetual compromise, and death a desperate plunge. Timid even more than we are wicked: cowardly, the best of us, where we would be brave.

2. There was a decision in the tone, which at last silenced importunity. *When he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying,*

The will of the Lord be done. Courage wrought resignation. The Apostle was brave, and therefore the disciples were submissive.

The will of the Lord, they said, *be done.*

The words might be read either as a prayer or as an acquiescence. And it is only they who can use them as the one, who can rightly utter them as the other.

It is a very common ejaculation, when all efforts are vain, *God's will be done.* So speaks the mourner, when all hope of restoration has fled from the bed of sickness. So speaks the bankrupt, when his last card is played, and the game has gone against him. So speaks the convicted criminal, when sin is found out, and the fabric of proof is at last complete against him.

But in all these cases *God's will be done* is not a prayer at all. It is the last cry of human weakness when it has vainly entered the lists against the Lord of Sabaoth. It means only, *Woe is me! for I am undone.* The thing formed has risen against its Maker, and the struggle has been too sore for it. We learn at last to suspect the words. They so often express, not the bending, but the crushing, of the self-will under the resistless will of God.

Therefore let us try to *pray* the words. We have them in the Lord's Prayer. *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.* Who wishes that? Who honestly wishes that God's will should be entirely done below? done with him, done in him, and done by him, even him himself? *The same is a perfect man. What? No place left for that crooked practice, for that perverse temper, for that darling lust? No room at all upon earth for that pastime which I so much enjoyed, for that sin which I so much loved? No: I did not mean that: I did not quite wish that!* Therefore *out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.* Thine own prayer—that prayer which thou hast said ten times this one day—condemns thee and finds thee out.

Resignation is no virtue except so far as it is the product of obedience. *Add*, St Peter says, *to temperance patience.* Be God's first in act: then shalt thou be His too in suffering.

(1) Some of us have of late broken quite loose from God.

We have taken His substance—His air and light, His gifts of reason and speech, His blessings of health and enjoyment—and wasted them, like the prodigal, in riotous or at least in careless living. This week has been, to many, a lost week for the soul. And some have been cut off in it; miserably, horribly, in their sins. We survive. God has been merciful, *not willing that we should perish.* Bethink yourselves tonight of the example of that holy man who, after days of feasting and excitement, *rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings* for all the revellers; saying, *It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.* Come back to God this night, ye wanderers, and pray Him for His Son's sake to grant you repentance and to grant you life. Try to pray the words, from the heart, *Thy will, O God, be done.*

(2) Others have done so. They have made sacrifices—I know it—this last week for conscience sake. They could not do something in faith: and without faith they knew that it would have been sin. They have foregone some profit: they might have been richer tonight, by ten pounds or twenty, than they are. I feel for them: and yet I envy them. They *are* the richer: richer in heaven's goods, if not in earth's; richer for eternity, if not for time. They are more *men* for it: strengthened in courage; more erect, more vigorous, for the self-denial. May God bless them, and show them the light of His countenance. *Yet not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the praise.* They have tried to do God's will: rightly or wrongly, they have so understood it, and therefore they have so done. Others judged differently; and to their own Master they also stand or fall. This we know, that no man ever yet left house or lands, no man ever yet sacrificed a gain or bore a loss, no man ever yet endured a cross or despised a shame, honestly and simply for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, *but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time*—peace, and strength, and a good conscience, and a brighter hope, and a nobler courage—*and in the world to come eternal life,* through His merits who *to this end both died and rose and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.*

LECTURE XI.

CHRISTIAN PRUDENCE.

ACTS XXIII. 6.

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

THERE was on record a charge given by the Lord Himself; a charge already (when these words were spoken) some thirty years old, but still fresh and young in the power of the Divine life; *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.* And there was a promise too, appended to that rule of conduct. *But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.* I purpose to show you this evening, in a few brief examples, how this charge was obeyed, and how this promise was fulfilled, in the case of St Paul.

When we last drew our subject from this interesting and instructive Book of Holy Scripture, we dwelt upon St Paul's courage. *What mean ye,* he said to his distressed friends, as they stood around him, entreating him to spare himself from the foreseen and foretold dangers of an intended journey, *What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of*

the Lord Jesus. And they themselves, finding that he would not be persuaded, and constrained to admire the boldness and constancy of their beloved leader, even while they trembled at its consequences for him, at last abandoned their fruitless remonstrances, and said, with a submission scarcely less admirable than his heroism, *The will of the Lord be done.* Tonight our subject is of a different, I had almost said, of an opposite, kind. We are to read of St Paul's prudence, of his discretion in avoiding idle risks, of his skill in extricating himself from hostile snares. *Be ye wise as serpents*, was the charge which he remembered: *it shall be given you*, in the hour of peril, *what ye shall speak*, was the promise pleaded and fulfilled.

You will perceive by the place of the text, that I propose to you this evening a very rapid survey. From the middle of the 21st chapter to the end of the 23rd is the field from which our topics are to be chosen.

St Paul made the journey on which he had resolved. From Cæsarea, where we left him, to Jerusalem, he travelled unmolested. He had with him the proceeds of that collection which he had everywhere been making for the poor Christians at Jerusalem. He was kindly received, on the night of his arrival, by the brethren whom he visited. On the next day a more public reception awaited him. All the elders of the Church, under the presidency of St James the resident Apostle, came together to hear his report of his eventful ministry among the Gentiles. Their interest was lively, and their thankfulness hearty. But they foresaw that danger out of which was to spring captivity and exile. Among the Christian converts were *thousands of Jews.* Though believers in Christ, they were also *zealous of the law.* They could not take in the idea of its abrogation. *Christ the end of the law*—its terminus and its termination—was a truth as yet dimly seen. A salvation aided by Christ, a salvation eked out by Christ, they could understand: but that salvation must be still, they thought, as of old, a salvation earned by human obedience to a law given by Moses. Now they were right in supposing that this was not St Paul's

doctrine. He always said that salvation must be all of Christ, or none of Christ. Grace, or debt; human merit, or Divine grace; one or other, not both. Salvation is too great a thing to be a thing of shreds and patches; here a stripe of merit and there a daub of grace. They were right in supposing that St Paul preached the abolition of the Law, so far as it could avail for man's salvation. But they were wrong in supposing that he preached the abrogation of the Law for Jews, so far as its outward observance was concerned. A Jew might be a Jew still; might still observe the Law, still practise its circumcision, keep its feasts, and bind himself (if he choose) by its vows. He must not indeed trust in these things; but neither need he abjure them. A Jew might be a Jew still, and yet be saved through Christ: a Gentile must not become a Jew, or he is *fallen from grace.*

The assembled elders, knowing what St Paul was and was not, and aware too of this general misconception of his teaching, recommended to him the following expedient. Let him show, by a practical proof, that he did not object to a Jew being a Jew still. There were four men, Jewish Christians, at that moment in Jerusalem, bound by a Nazarite's vow. That vow, made commonly at a time of personal danger by land or sea, by disease or accident, bound the person undertaking it to abstain from wine and to let his hair grow uncut for a certain period, at the end of which particular sacrifices were to be offered, which were not always within the command of a poor man's purse. It was by no means unusual for richer men to bear the expense of those sacrifices in behalf of the poor. The Christian elders recommend St Paul to do this; to include himself for a few days in the Nazarite's vow of these four Jewish Christians, and then to pay the cost of the prescribed offerings for all. *Be at charges for them*, the 24th verse says, *that they may shave their heads:* that is, bear the charge, pay the expence, of those sacrifices which must be offered before they can rid themselves of their vow and cut the hair of their heads in sign of its termination. The advice was friendly,

and St Paul followed it. He who had said in one of his letters, *To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews*, acted now upon that principle. He had never made it a principle of doctrine that Jews should abandon their ceremonial Law: *he* was a Jew: therefore he might perform one of those ceremonies with a safe conscience, if by so doing he might conciliate his countrymen, and thus by God's grace *save some*.

In things indifferent, my brethren, the motive is everything: and we know his.

The expedient thus adopted was partially successful. For seven days he showed himself in the temple-courts, in the company of the four Nazarites, awaiting the moment of the proper offering. That moment was almost come, when a furious tumult was roused against him by some Jews who had come up from the province of Asia to be present at the feast of Pentecost. They declared that an Ephesian whom they knew by sight, Trophimus by name, one of St Paul's *companions in travel*, had been brought by him, though a Gentile, into that part of the temple-precincts which was accessible only to Jews. On this pretext, probably false as well as futile, the whole of that excitable and fickle population threw itself upon St Paul; dragged him out of the court of the Israelites, while the great gates of that court were closed after him by the Levites; and prepared to take his life, either by stoning, or by a more summary process of throwing him from the precipice of the temple. At this moment the Roman officer, commanding from his tower of Antonia every occurrence within the sacred courts below, brought down his armed force, stopped the tumult, and took forcible possession of the person of the Apostle. Unable to ascertain the facts from the incoherent answers of the crowd, he ordered the prisoner to be carried up into the fortress, which communicated by a staircase with the cloisters of the temple. On those stairs, forced upwards by the pressure of the angry multitude, he was permitted at length by the chief captain to address a few words of explanation and remonstrance to the

people below. To the surprise of the chief captain, who had imagined him an Egyptian outlaw, he had addressed himself to him in Greek: now to his countrymen he speaks in their own loved and sacred tongue, and tells them, at first amidst *a great silence*, the narrative of his youth and of his change.

By birth a Jew; brought up here, in their own holy city, amongst all the associations of Judaism; taught by their own most celebrated master, the wise and learned Gamaliel; zealous for their law like any of them; nay more, an ardent persecutor of Christians even to the death; commissioned by the Sanhedrin to carry their persecution even to strange cities; surely they might listen to him. Surely they might believe that all his prepossessions, all his prejudices, all his early and deeply rooted principles, pointed once in a direction entirely their own, and, if changed, could have been changed only by some resistless force of reason, of which, if they will hear him to the end, he will give them the account.

He tells them of his conversion: of that sudden arrest, at noontime, near Damascus; that supernatural light, that articulate voice, that calm remonstrance, that authoritative direction; then that gracious message, sent by one of themselves—*Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews which dwelt there*—which had restored him to sight, summoned him to baptism, and brought him back to this same city a witness of *the faith which once he destroyed.*

Thus far he had been listened to, if not with approval, yet in silence. It was not till, in recounting a subsequent communication made to him in Jerusalem by his new, his Divine Master, he reached the offensive, the hateful name *Gentile*, that the storm broke forth anew, and the threatening cries from below constrained the Roman commander to hurry his removal into the fortress which was to be his prison. Bewildered and baffled by the conflicting accounts of him, the chief captain now resorted to that cruel expedient of the Roman law, an examination by torture. St Paul was already bound, for the application of the torturer's lash, when the mention of his Roman citizenship alarmed

the authorities, and wrought an instant change in his condition and prospects.

The chief captain now desires to obtain a clearer insight into his prisoner's case, by subjecting him to a formal trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. After a night passed in the fortress, St Paul stands before the high priest and elders. And here, after one earnest gaze upon the countenances of his judges, he opens his defence with the serious assertion of his entire conscientiousness. From his youth till this day he has lived in obedience to conscience. A solemn and an instructive word for us! Which of us can say that which St Paul declares of himself even with reference to his days of darkness and error? Irritated by this calm and dauntless bearing of one whom he has prejudged as a heretic and a criminal, the high priest *commanded those that stood by to smite him on the mouth.* And St Paul, as if to show us that, with many a bright, we have but one perfect example, is betrayed into a retort, which, however just, stands in marked contrast with the immovable silence (under the like provocation) of his Divine Master, and for which afterwards he himself apologizes, whatever be the exact import of those difficult words, *I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest* (whether an infirmity of sight had betrayed him into mistaking the person; or whether *I wist not* means *I did not reflect, I did not consider, I did not remember,* as I ought to have done, *that he was the high priest*), with the recitation of the words of the Law itself, *It is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

It is at this point that the text occurs. Perceiving himself to be standing before a prejudiced tribunal; one which would not be influenced by the force of truth; one to which he would vainly address the language of argument, remonstrance, or expostulation; St Paul avails himself, with consummate skill, of the notorious division of opinion on the most elementary points of doctrine among the judges themselves, and enlists on his side the approval of one half at least of his audience, by the words before read to you, *Brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in*

question. As though he had said, *What question can be so fundamental as that of a future state of being? Till you can agree upon that, why waste your strength in trying minor heresies? Settle that among yourselves, and then turn your thoughts to me.*

The effect of the words was magical. It broke up the hearing. *There arose a great cry.* The materialist Sadducee, denying alike the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirit, was diverted from the case before him by a prior and deeper difference with his colleague on the judgment-seat. The Pharisee, right thus far in his creed, that he held the immateriality of the soul and the resurrection of the children of Abraham, found in the prisoner an unexpected ally, and claimed him as his associate in his ancestral feud with the Sadducee. And thus, this trial, like the former, ending only in confusion and violence, the puzzled Roman must again take back his prisoner, and make out, as he can, for himself, who he is and what he has done.

But the disappointed foe has adopted a readier and more wicked stratagem. More than forty Jews bind themselves under a horrible curse to take Paul's life before they will either eat or drink. They intend to induce the chief captain to bring him once again before the council, as if to make some further investigation of his crime; and they, before he reaches the place of hearing, are ready to kill him. The plot is made known to Paul by a young relative, here only known to us, his *sister's son:* and is communicated, under his direction, by the same person to the chief captain himself. The result is a hurried night-journey, under a strong armed escort, from Jerusalem to Cæsarea. There the Roman governor holds his court; and the matter must go before him. A letter from the chief captain accompanies the prisoner, explaining how much and how little Claudius Lysias has been able to ascertain concerning him. Felix reads the letter, and, after an enquiry as to the Apostle's birthplace, reserves him for the accusers' coming, and commits him for safe keeping to the prætorium of Herod. The Christian home of the Evangelist Philip, where St Paul's last visit to Cæsarea was passed in comforting communion, is exchanged now for a rougher

home and a less congenial converse. With Cæsarea our sketch tonight began, and in Cæsarea it terminates.

Our last subject was courage: our present subject is prudence. Are the two qualities entirely antagonistic? Is one man courageous, and another man prudent, and no one man (unless it be St Paul himself) both at once? I trust we shall see, in the few moments which remain to us, that prudence and courage are but two sides of one character; two expressions, under varying circumstances, of the same Christian mind; two workings, in opposite states, of the same Holy, Divine, and indwelling Spirit.

(1) You have seen St Paul taking part in a Nazarite's vow, that he might disarm the unreasoning hostility of his countrymen. (2) You have heard him putting forward in his own defence every term and every circumstance most likely to conciliate towards him the mind of his Jewish audience. (3) You have heard him availing himself of his Roman citizenship to avoid the infliction of a cruel and unjust torture. (4) And you have seen him taking advantage of the doctrinal dissensions of his judges, to make his escape from a verdict certain to have been condemning. In all these ways he showed prudence. I can fancy some critics accusing him even of finesse. I can imagine some censors calling him timid, shifty, disingenuous, evasive. Happily his whole life is before us, his whole mind disclosed, his conduct under all manner of circumstances legible as in the sunbeam. And therefore such cavils or such criticisms are not likely to damage. We know too much of St Paul to believe them. It only shows us how often we may misjudge a character by not knowing more of it: how often we may pronounce a man cowardly, because we only see him (as it were) dividing a tribunal by sowing some seed of discord, or evading a penalty by pleading some accidental or technical exemption. God in His good Providence has kept us from thus judging, for lack of evidence, His good and holy servant St Paul. Now therefore, using his example, let us lay down two or three rules of Christian prudence.

1. Christian prudence has place only in things lawful.

Where there is nothing wrong in doing either this or that, we may do this rather than that, because the one would be safe and the other dangerous. St Paul was a Jew; and the four men were Jews: therefore there was nothing wrong, according to his most constant and earnest principles, in their having a Nazarite's vow. But if any one of the five had been a Gentile instead of a Jewish Christian, no fear or favour would have induced St Paul to *be at charges with them.* We have an exact illustration of this, in both its parts, in St Paul's own history. Timothy, his friend and comrade, had a Jewish parent. It was optional therefore with him to be either Jew or Gentile. St Paul caused him to be circumcised before he took him as his companion. He had always said that a Jew might keep the Law, and Timothy was a Jew by his mother's side. Uncircumcised, he would have been useless: the Jews would not have tolerated him: to gain the Jews, he must be circumcised, and no principle forbade it. Another friend and companion, Titus, was a Gentile: he had no Jewish parent: and therefore to have allowed him to be circumcised, whatever the temptation on the ground of expediency or of usefulness, would have been a dereliction of duty; a departure from the great principle of St Paul's ministry, the entire and absolute freedom of the Gentile from the yoke of the Levitical Law. St Paul, we are expressly told, would not allow Titus to be circumcised. The form of the example is obsolete; but not its spirit. There are those, my friends, among us modern Christians, who worship prudence; who do not see the difference between prudence on principle, and prudence without or against principle; whose only idea is conciliation, and who end by sacrificing everything to a sort of vague and unmeaning complaisance. Remember, it must always be wrong to do wrong, whatever be the motive: to say a wrong thing, or to do a wrong thing—to refrain from saying the right thing, or to refrain from doing the right thing—in the hope or on the plea of winning others to you, must always be sinful, let who will be the doer, and let what will be the end proposed. Prudence has only place in things lawful. If one of you says, *I wish to gain or to retain*

a hold upon such a one, and therefore I will go with him to a place or into a society which I feel to be against my conscience, that person is not exercising Christian prudence, but he is practising a sinful compromise.

2. Again, Christian prudence must be tried by its motive. It is easy to be prudent—far easier, to most natures, than to be imprudent—in religious things; easier to sit still, easier to keep silence, easier to say smooth words and to refrain from earnest reproofs, than the contrary. But the question is, Why? Why do we become *all things to all men,* in things lawful or indifferent? Is it to save ourselves trouble? Is it to avoid the reproach of being *righteous overmuch?* Is it to make ourselves popular, the friend of all men, the person whose company is liked by the careless and the sinful? Is it to gain the character of a moderate and sensible and calm-minded person; a man of good judgment; which too often means, a man of no earnestness and no zeal? That was not St Paul's prudence. Hear his own account of it, as it is written in the 9th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians: *Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law: to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* You see what a motive there was, what a noble, what an unselfish, what a divine motive, in all that St Paul did to conciliate others: it was not that they might approve, applaud, or admire him; it was not that they might load him with honours or gifts; it was not that they might call him a sensible guide, a wise teacher; far less, a man of the world, a man of large experience of human nature, and of ready sympathy with human failings: it was, that he *might gain* them, gain them for Christ, gain them from hardness to faith and from the power of Satan for God: it was that he *might by all means save some,* rescue them from darkness and sin, and secure the safety of their souls in the day of the Lord. It was for this that he went for those seven days to the Temple, with the four men whose vow he thought needless: for this, that

he reminded the Jewish mob of his Judaism, pleaded his Roman citizenship to the Roman, and divided the Sanhedrin by calling himself a Pharisee. My friends, the question of motives is always a trying one: we cannot settle it for others, we cannot always settle it for ourselves: so many things enter into the composition of our best motives; so hard is it to shut out self even from our religion; so fertile are we in excuses for following inclination, and then clothing inclination in the garb of duty. Nevertheless by motives will be decided the last great judgment, and God even now leaves us not without some plain insight into them. Christian prudence, like Christian zeal, must be tried by its motive: if we would be (in any right sense) *all things to all men*, we must see that the object is, not to serve ourselves, but to gain them. *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*

3. And therefore, in the third place, let us say that there can be no such thing as a Christian prudence, where there is not also (in its place) a Christian courage. Thus the two parts of the subject are brought together at its close: St Paul's courage last time, St Paul's prudence now. The two things are not only capable of combination: they are necessarily combined. One man is all fire, all energy, all zeal: he cares not for the world, he will set all right, he will correct abuses, he will rebuke sin: he fears not: he is all courage. Well, wait a while: see how it goes on: see how it ends. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God:* a spirit like his scarcely reminds us of the lowly Saviour, scarcely breathes anything of the love of God. When the motive comes to be disclosed, perhaps there was more of nature than of grace in that vehemence: we know not what God may have thought of it, or how He will deal with it. Another was all for quietness: every line of distinction was to be erased, every sharp corner rounded off, every colour shaded into every other: sins were always excused, punishments (Divine or human) disliked and deprecated: there was no backbone in his religion: you knew not why anything at all was this rather

than that: you began (as you listened) to doubt the clearest definitions of truth and error, of right and wrong. Prudence had here degenerated into timidity; and that charity which is based on truth, into a goodnature which merely avoids and dreads trouble. My friends, St Paul's courage and St Paul's prudence were parts of one whole. Take either away, and the Christian fabric was shaken. *I am ready not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus:* and therefore it is that *I am made all things to all men*, even *that by all means* for His dear sake *I may* at last *save some*. The courage of the Gospel, and the prudence of the Gospel, are, alike and equally, ingredients of the *mind which was in Christ Jesus*. In Him, and in all who are like Him, courage is a courage of love, and prudence is a prudence of devotion.

4. Finally, there is a prudence wholly of good: a prudence, yes, a twofold prudence, to which no limits need be set, on which no conditions need to be imposed. A prudence lest we do harm to others, and a prudence lest we ourselves fall unawares into sin.

(1) How many, calling themselves Christians, are careless lest they offend Christ's little ones; careless how much they *give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully;* how much they cause the Gospel which they profess to be calumniated or blasphemed. They take no pains to *provide things honest in the sight of all men*. They go to the very edge of the precipice of evil, and think it enough if they just fall not over it. Meanwhile others are scandalized by their temerity, or encouraged by it and emboldened to do evil. This is for lack of a Christian prudence; for lack of that grace of which St Paul wrote, *If meat* or drink, if my doing or my forbearing to do, *make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth*, I will take no freedom, I will allow myself in no indulgence however innocent, however wholesome, *lest I make my brother to offend*.

(2) And as with regard to others, so also for ourselves, there is a prudence wholly of good: a prudence in regard to spiritual evils: a prudence which foresees, which avoids, which guards

against, known and experienced temptations; temptations which will assail, because they have assailed; and which, even because they have prevailed against us, can be ascertained in the future, anticipated, and provided for. Here indeed courage and prudence coalesce and are at one. Here bravery is fear, and the timid man conquers. Here the chief enemy is self, and therefore he who *rules his own spirit* hath already *taken the city. It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God;* and he tempts God who runs a risk needlessly. There is a foolhardiness which is the worst cowardice: to flee from evil is the first point of courage. The intemperate man ought to tremble at wine; the licentious man ought to close the very eye which is the inlet of evil. He is a fool who knows not his own weakness; and he is presumptuous who goes *with ten thousand* against *twenty.* God give us all this prudence! for with it He gives courage, with it strength, and with it victory.

LECTURE XII.

THE SECRET LIFE.

ACTS XXIII. 11.

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

How refreshing, after a day of cloud and storm, to see a sunset of perfect calm; to have one hour at evening beautifully tranquil, the warring elements pacified, the air still and fragrant, the sky itself, as it were, swept and garnished in token of a peaceful night and a glorious dawn. How refreshing (to change the figure from the aspect of nature to the experience of human life) after a long day spent in the strife of tongues, whether amidst the rivalries of common business, or the ceaseless contradictions and wranglings of a court of justice, to return at its close to the well-loved home, where the sweet or playful greeting of a long-tried affection in one moment smooths the knit brow and relaxes the painful tension of the overwrought brain.

Such is the contrast between the day and the night here presented to us. The day has been one of anxious exertion. The morning saw St Paul standing before the council, defending himself under a false accusation before a prejudiced and blood-thirsty tribunal. There had been more than the common painfulness of such a position. The judge had ordered the prisoner, at his first words, to be smitten on the mouth. And the suddenness of the assault had drawn from the injured man a

retort which on reflection he regretted. We all know how bitter, to a conscientious man, is the remembrance of such a deviation, momentary though it was and speedily atoned for, from his entire Christian consistency. The only real pain is that which we inflict upon ourselves: where there is no self-reproach, all else is tolerable. As the day went on, a fierce and angry storm had raged in the Sanhedrin: it was not till there was danger of his being actually *pulled in pieces* by contending factions, that St Paul was rescued from the council-room and brought back to his prison within the fortress.

Such had the day been: a day of exertion, a day of discomfort, a day of danger, *of rebuke and blasphemy.* And the prospect was as gloomy as the present. A long imprisonment, a tedious separation from Christian friends, and a vexatious interruption of Christian duties; more than probably, a confessor's sufferings and a martyr's end; these were *the things before,* as the other were *the things behind.*

Now it is in the night between two such days that the words of the text come in. The chief captain has *commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force, and bring him into the castle. And the night following* this scene of commotion and violence, *the Lord* Jesus Christ Himself *stood by him,* or *presented Himself to him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* What a contrast to the rough voices which have lately raged around him! To be spoken kindly to, to be thought worthy of any consideration or any regard; much more, to hear a word of encouragement, to be told to take comfort, to *be of good cheer;* even this would have been something: when a man has been long treated with contempt and insult, it has been known to bring the tears to his eyes to be but saluted in the street by a passing stranger: how much more, to be visited in the prison by Christ Himself, to hear His voice speaking to him; the same voice which called once to him from heaven to convert and to commission; the same voice which he had heard once again when he was *praying in the temple, sending him far hence unto the Gentiles;*

the same voice which in the distant Corinth had commanded him to *speak and not hold his peace*, because Christ *was with him, and had much people in that city;* the same voice which had once answered his prayer for relief from suffering, with the *far better* assurance that his Saviour's *grace* should be *made perfect in* his *weakness;* to hear that voice calling him now by his name, and bidding him to take courage, what must this have been to him? how must it have wiped from his mind every trace of irritation and of weariness; how must it have rekindled his hope and reanimated his courage; how must it have brought to his remembrance the words, uttered in distress and suffering, of his Master Himself, *And shall leave me alone...and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*

To be visited by Christ, and to hear the voice of Christ, this was enough: but what words were those. *Thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem.* The original is stronger still, expressive of a bold and public protest, *a persistent calling to witness* in behalf of Christ. So then his Master had accounted him faithful. His Master had heard all that passed; heard and approved. That for which other men wait, and wait still, and die without receiving, a verdict of Divine acquittal, St Paul has now, has from the lips of his Judge: Christ counts him faithful, Christ approves his work, Christ accepts his testimony. O recompence ample and glorious for any toil, for any suffering! Christ says He accepts: *who is he that condemneth?*

But more yet than this. *As thou didst maintain my cause at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* It is on record, in his own Epistles, how much St Paul had longed to visit Rome; with how warm an affection he already regarded that congregation which was gathered in the metropolis of the Empire and of the world. Now his Master tells him that he shall go there: not perhaps as he had intended; not in the exercise of his own free will, planning for himself and executing for himself the enterprises of the Apostolic calling: but he shall go there: he shall minister to that congregation: yea, in the camp of the Roman soldiers, and in the palace of the Roman Emperor, his voice shall

be heard, his testimony shall be borne, and Christ shall be *magnified in his body, whether by life or by death.*

To us, who know not the motive and feel not the impulse of a burning Christian zeal, the promise may seem to speak rather fear than hope: it opened before a weary man the prospect of labour, before a suffering man the prospect of suffering: it said, *Think not that the battle is ended; think not that rest is earned; dream not of a brief inactivity, and then a happy entrance into an eternal home. Far other is thy portion. Thou hast laboured, and thou shalt labour: thou hast journeyed, and thou shalt journey: thou hast struggled, and wrestled, and suffered, and not fainted; and for my name's sake thou shalt do even thus again.* We must call in St Paul himself to be his own interpreter, and hear him say, *I am in a strait betwixt two; having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you: and having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith:* I know it, and I am willing.

We have been called on late occasions to dwell upon various features of St Paul's regenerated character. His devotion, his wisdom, his courage, his tenderness, his endurance, his prudence; many opposite and at first sight contradictory qualities, which yet enter, every one of them, into the composition of that mind which is really according to Christ Jesus; have been presented to us by turns, as we have studied the pages of this Book of Holy Scripture. And St Paul himself seems to recognize as a profitable occupation the study of his Christian example. *Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ. They glorified God in me.* The only fear is, lest we should ever forget Christ in His servant; lest, in our admiration of the man, we should lose sight for one moment of the grace which wrought in him; that Divine influence and inworking of which he spoke himself, when he disclaimed all personal merit and all separate strength, and said, *I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* We must take care to *glorify God in him.*

And therefore I am glad that this evening's subject, following so naturally from that of last Sunday, takes us into a higher region than that of any human character; traces the river to its first spring, and shows it to us, not in its derived and too often turbid windings, but in its original sparkling freshness as it *proceeds out of the* very *throne of God and of the Lamb.* We see tonight, as we do in every page of his writings, what made St Paul that which he was. The history and the Epistles in this as in every point harmonize and are at one. The Epistles give us his inner mind: the history gives us his mind in action; shows how that principle which is necessarily a secret with the man himself comes out and works in the life that is seen. Here and there—the text is such an instance—something occurs even in the narrative, to give a momentary glimpse into that inmost being, with which *the stranger doth not intermeddle.*

It is easy to direct the attention, and even to attract a large tribute of admiration, to St Paul's wonderful gifts; his extraordinary self-devotion, his profound humility, his great patience, his dauntless heroism. But the moment we pass within, and seek to apprehend the moving spring of all this, to understand what his secret soul was busied in and possessed with and supported by, then we feel ourselves powerless; we are *speaking mysteries*, not to others only, but to ourselves. We are out of our depth: we are using words, not so much to express, but rather to veil and to perplex. I would that it might be otherwise this evening with some who hear. For indeed the effort must be made, if we would not disparage instead of glorifying God in him.

Let us at least then dare to say this—and his own words best say it—that to St Paul *to live was Christ.* There was not an act, and there was not a word; not a feeling, and not an effort; into which Christ did not enter. In saying this, we say all. And you cannot open any one chapter of any one of St Paul's Epistles, without seeing that this at least is true.

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,*

of whom I am chief. For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering.

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for continued acceptance. *It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for the daily supply of grace. *He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee. I will glory therefore in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for guidance. *God Himself and our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you.*

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for comfort. *As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.*

St Paul looked to the Lord Jesus Christ for the relief of trial. *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

St Paul looked to the Lord Jesus Christ for approval. *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*

St Paul looked to the Lord Jesus Christ for success in work. *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, putting me into the ministry.*

Christ was his subject. *We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord. Whom we preach.*

Christ was his Master. *I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*

Christ was his boast. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Christ was his hope. *Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. The Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.*

Christ was his life. *Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

Christ was the one object of his expectation and of his aspiration, in reference to the state beyond death. *I have a*

desire to depart, and to be with Christ. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Christ was his present Friend and Comforter, in the emergencies of the life that now is. You have heard it in the text of this evening.

Let me earnestly add, even before I pass on, that St Paul never so spoke of Christ as to leave out of sight the blessed revelation of the Father, or the comforting and inspiring agency of the Holy Ghost. To him *God was in Christ. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.* And to him the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. He never forgot, as some Christians have done, the Unity of the Godhead. Christ was *God with us:* and the Holy Spirit was to him *Christ in us.*

But I would ask with all seriousness, Is not this our radical defect, as professed Christians, that Christ is nothing to us? When we have said that His death atoned for our sins, is anything left? Are we not, at the best, what good men were under the Old Dispensation? What know we of Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, as the Lord our Strength, as the Lord our Master, our Friend, and our Hope?

And if not, why not?

1. There is sometimes, in these latter days, a great ignorance of sin. That deep sense of personal guilt, which breathes so impressively in the Psalms of David; that consciousness of the present weight of sin as of *a sore burden too heavy for us to bear;* that fearful apprehension of a soul cut off from God, by reason of its defilement with that which God abhors; this is an experience rare amongst us: the words remain—a man can scarcely worship without using them—but the thing is lost: *When I consider, I am afraid of Him,* is a combination of ideas, scarcely of this century. We have agreed together not to be afraid of God: we have softened down the revelation of justice and judgment, till now it speaks but the refined language of a luxurious age, and ceases altogether to awaken in us any feeling corresponding to that which St Paul designates as *the terror of the Lord.* We scarcely see now why we want

a Saviour: surely the mercy of God, interpreted by man's shrinking from punishment, will do as well as the more assured hope of a pardon purchased for us through suffering? God grant us grace so to learn betimes the lesson of our sin, that we may not have to awaken to it for the first time, when it flashes upon us in the light of eternity, or in the vision of the *great white throne.*

2. Again, the even tenor of a calm uneventful life is against our appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ in some of His chief and most attractive offices. One day is so like another, and each day is so tranquil and so unsuggestive of danger, that we are never stirred to the depth: a surface life is all our life: the profound Ocean within lies all asleep, and scarcely a wave breaks upon the shore of our monotonous and untroubled being. Such a state is unfavourable to religion; most unfavourable to a strong and vigorous hold upon the revelation of Christ. If trouble came, if distress, if pestilence, if famine, if war; if the windows of heaven were opened, and God's *four sore judgments* broke suddenly upon a forgetful earth; then we should see what Christ means: then the idea of a living Saviour, controlling the winds and waves, guiding the thunderbolt of judgment, and setting in the cloud (the while) the rainbow of mercy; a Saviour present with His people, and soon to come again to victory and to judgment; would become once more a reality and a hope: men would read St Paul's Epistles with a quickened sympathy, and his history with a sense of its reality and of its strength. *When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

And must we wait for these things? Must we resign ourselves to this spiritual torpor, and say that only the hand of judgment can break it? God forbid! *If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* We must strive, God helping us, to stir the stagnant pool of a commonplace life by turning into it the stream of that *river which,* always and in all times, *makes glad the city of God.* In other words, we must strive, and we must

watch, and we must pray, that we ourselves may so enter into the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in all His manifold offices of grace and love, that we may neither need the stroke of judgment, nor yet be dizzied by it if it comes. Begin this night to call upon Jesus Christ as that which St Paul found Him. Begin to *live the life that you now live in the flesh by faith in that Son of God* who transformed and glorified his. If you do not all at once consciously find Him; if you have often to gaze upon Him in the darkness, and to pray to Him through the cloud; still persevere: struggle on: rest not till your life is a Christian life, as much in its secret as in its outward workings. Determine, God helping you, to rely upon Christ, even if you cannot yet see Him. Believe in His Atonement, in His Intercession, in His Advent; believe, above all, in His life. Be sure that He is there; there, in the place whither your prayer goes; there, where God is: there, in all the truth of His manhood; there, in all the power of His Godhead. Pray towards Him: pray on the strength of Him: pray through Him: and ask Him, of His infinite mercy, not to leave you for long without a token, without an evidence, of His being.

3. And then let your life, like St Paul's life, be His witness. *As thou didst utter thy protest concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* Yes, that is the third thing—the only other which I will mention—interfering now, as indeed in all times, with the distinctively Christian faith. It is the looseness of our Christian walk. We do not feel more because we do not practise more; because we do not carry our warfare into all its parts; because we do not seriously set ourselves to be holy as Christ is holy. Brief and perfunctory is our daily worship; hasty and superficial our evening self-examination; slight the hold of our religion upon our life; ready the excuse, ready and plausible, for keeping just this, and just that, out of the reach of conscience, out of the sight of God. And then the sowing has its reaping: the faith which is thus trifled with becomes a mere opinion; the principle which would not practise becomes a dead letter; and the Saviour whom we have

often *prayed to depart* withdraws Himself, reluctantly but irrevocably, *out of our coasts.* Change that prayer, beloved brethren, this night; from a prayer to depart, into a wrestling with Him to stay. Protest for Him at Jerusalem, and He will make you His witness also at Rome. Let your daily life be lived as in His presence; as reminding others of Him; as confessing Him and witnessing to Him in the life that now is: and He will make that witness evermore brighter, stronger, and more consistent, till faith is swallowed up in sight, and hope lost in fruition.

To those who have long waited for Christ, and walked with Christ, and witnessed for Christ, the text itself has at length a true, if not a literal fulfilment. When they want Christ, they shall have Him. *The night following the Lord stood by him.* Yes, *the night following:* not in the glare of day, not *in the chief places of concourse*, but in the stillness of night and in the solitude of the chamber, Christ visits them that are His, and adapts His consolations to their individual case and need. Trouble may be upon them; care, want, bereavement: harder still to bear, ingratitude, undutifulness: unnatural neglect and coldness: it may be, suffering for His sake, because they would not *follow a multitude to do evil*, because they would reprove sin and strive after holiness: even then, even there, shall Christ come, and with His own calm voice, bringing its witness with it, bid them to be of good cheer, and assure them of His abiding presence. *This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord:* no vain vision, no fallacious fancy, picturing Angel forms and counterfeiting Angel voices to the mere novice (if even a novice) in the life of God; but a presence felt within, and a consolation ministered personally in the sober promised influence of the Divine Spirit.

Seek, my friends, that presence: cherish that influence: and life itself will take a new colour from the hopes and joys beyond.

LECTURE XIII.

THE GOOD CONFESSION.

Acts xxiv. 14, 15.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

How striking, and yet how simple, are the contrasts of Scripture; the cases in which (as must often happen in real life, and therefore also in true history) two persons appear together on the stage, exhibiting, in speech or action, a totally opposite principle, spirit, and character.

The chapter before us opens with such a contrast.

We left St Paul in custody at Cæsarea. After that hurried night-journey, under a strong military escort, of which we glanced at the details on a former occasion, he had been presented before the governor Felix with the letter describing his case, and then remanded for a fuller hearing when his accusers also should come.

His enemies at Jerusalem lost no time in following him. Within five days the high priest Ananias, accompanied by a deputation from the Sanhedrin, and by one of those professional advocates who practised in the provincial courts of Rome, arrived

in Cæsarea to lay their information against Paul before the tribunal of Felix. It is almost startling to read the language of adulation in which the orator Tertullus addresses the presiding magistrate. Felix was a man conspicuous even among Roman governors for violence, rapacity and licentiousness. He was of low birth, raised from a servile position; and the historian Tacitus says of him that *in the practice of all manner of cruelty and lust he wielded the powers of a king with the temper of a slave.* With a certain degree of vigour in the suppression of tumults and robberies he combined a meanness of personal revenge which led him to procure the murder of a high priest by paid assassins in the very sanctuary of the temple. His wife Drusilla he had enticed away from a lawful husband by the aid (it is said) of a magician. When at last he quitted the province, he was followed to Rome by the accusations of his subjects, and was indebted for his escape from justice to the personal interest of his brother, a freedman and favourite, with the Emperor Nero.

This was the man whom the orator Tertullus, overacting his part, represented, in his opening address, as a model of beneficence and clemency. How different in all times the flattery of the worldly from the courtesy of the Christian.

The charge brought against the prisoner seems to have included three particulars.

(1) He was guilty of sedition; and so of disloyalty to the Roman government. (2) He was guilty of heresy; the *ringleader of a sect;* and so a renegade from Judaism. (3) He was guilty of profaning the temple; and thus of affronting a worship which was under the patronage and protection of Rome.

The charges were the old ones: familiar to us already in the case of Stephen, and in the history of One greater and holier still.

The time came for the Apostle's defence. And this was the substance of it, as preserved for us in the record of his friend and companion St Luke.

He begins by selecting the one only ground on which he could count himself fortunate in being tried before Felix. He could

depend at least upon his acquaintance with the rites and customs of Judaism. *Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I cheerfully answer for myself; because thou canst know for certain*—thou art able to recognize this as a matter of evident fact—*that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem.* Felix knew the day of that feast of Pentecost for which St Paul had gone up to Jerusalem. He knew that it was but twelve days since. Twelve days: it was a short time to account for. A short time for the commission of this triple crime; sedition, heresy, and sacrilege. Twelve days: and already five of them in prison. How had the other seven been spent?

And neither in the temple did they find me disputing with any man, or causing the onset of a multitude, nor in the synagogues, nor about the city; nor can they prove to thee the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call a sect—in accordance with that doctrine and that system to which Tertullus in his accusation has given the contemptuous title of *the sect of the Nazarenes—so serve I the God of our fathers.* Not a new God: not, as they would represent it, some novel Deity, unknown to my nation, and imported from the regions of imagination and invention: no; *the God of my fathers;* the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob; the God of prophets and kings and righteous men along the whole line of Israel and of David. *So serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets; having hope toward God, which these men also themselves accept, that there is to be a resurrection both of just and unjust.*

A *hope*, St Paul calls it: what do we?

But let us take the passage as a whole.

1. And first, a single word upon the manner of his address. He stands before a wicked ruler; a profligate man in private, and a tyrant in public life. Yet he pays to him the respect due to his office. It is the same man who wrote lately from Corinth to the Roman Christians, *Render therefore to all their dues; fear, to*

whom fear; honour, to whom honour. There is all the difference in the world between servility and courtesy; between the flattery of Tertullus and the manly respectfulness of St Paul. Insolence to rulers, however irreligious or however immoral, is no part of the religion of Christ. *Render unto Cæsar*, our Lord said Himself, *the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

2. The reverence of his answer strikes us: so does also its cheerfulness. *I cheerfully answer for myself.* He was here in prison; tossed from one judgment-seat to another; surrounded by violent opponents, hated, maligned, and plotted against. The issue of the trial was doubtful: this only he knew from the revelation of the Lord Himself, that he had a testimony to bear to Him at Rome. The present was dark, the future was ambiguous: and yet he answers for himself cheerfully. Is it a needless or an exceptional lesson which I draw from these words; the lesson of a Christian cheerfulness? If we are in Christ's hands; if we are on Christ's side in the great conflict; if we have *committed the keeping of our souls to Him;* if we in any sense *know in whom we have believed;* what circumstance, what danger, what accusation, what anxiety, is enough to justify despondency? Pain of mind or body, want, weakness, anguish, impending death; all shall be well: for *I am Christ's, and Christ is God's.* Leave despondency to the unbelieving: yet leave not even him in it. Tell him of One who died and who lives; of One who is nearer than the nearest friend, and merciful as He is true; and bid him also cast away his burden at the foot of the cross, and rise at Christ's bidding to joy and newness of life.

3. When we turn from the manner to the matter of the defence, we find two of the three charges calmly and earnestly repelled. The charge of sedition, and the charge of sacrilege, are refuted by an appeal to fact. None can dare to say of him, that his time, his brief time, in Jerusalem had been spent in creating disturbances, or even in holding disputations. His supposed desecration of the Temple was not only untrue; it was the very opposite of truth. For a very different purpose had he

frequented its courts; to show (in its proper place) his respect for the Law, and his sense, if not now of its necessity, yet at least of its innocence for Israel.

4. But there is just one of the three charges which he rather qualifies than repels. The accusers had called him a sectarian: *a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.* And *this*, he says, *I confess to thee, that after the way*, the system or rule of life, *which they call a sect;* the word is the same (in the original language) in the accusation and in the defence; *after the way which they call a sect*, a new party and a new schism in the original Church of Israel, *so worship I.* The thing is true. If it be a schismatical thing to be a Christian, if it be heresy to believe the Gospel, I am guilty of it. *According to* the doctrine and the practice of *the way*—that *way* of which we have read so often as a term for the Gospel system—*so worship I.* I avow and I glory in it.

Are we, my friends, equally clear and equally plainspoken in the matter of our worship? Do we all know *after what way* we serve God; by whose rule we shape our prayers and fashion our life? Of course we all answer, By the rule of Christ. But then we must enquire further, Is there anything distinctive in our religion? anything which shows and proves that it is Christ's religion, rather than the religion of Moses, or of nature? You all see that I am struck by this consideration: that St Paul worshipped God according to a particular system; not vaguely as the Creator and Preserver, not merely as the Lawgiver and the Judge, but definitely and precisely as revealed in Christ. St Paul had thought it necessary to come out from the prevalent worship of his time, though that worship was founded on a revelation from God, in order that he might worship according to that way which his countrymen as a body called and persecuted as a heresy. What is there, I seriously and earnestly enquire of you, to mark our confessions, our prayers, our praises, our thanksgivings, as offered *according to the way*, which is, the way of Christ? Does our Lord Jesus Christ find a real place in all? Do we think of Him, do we trust in Him, do we enter through Him, on the ground of His sacrifice and of His inter-

cession, whensoever, in public or in private, we endeavour to approach God? And O, let me add, Is there anything in our manner of life, in our habits of speech and action, which recognizes and which can remind men of our faith in *the way*, the way of Christ?

5. St Paul repudiates the charge of sedition and the charge of profanation: he in part confesses the crime of heresy. If it be heresy to be a Christian, he is a heretic. But observe how he claims for himself, all the time, the position of the truly orthodox; how he asserts that his enemies, and not he, are the real dissenters from Israel's faith and from Israel's hope: the God whom he worships is *the God of the fathers*, and his grasp of the Law and the Prophets is as tenacious as it was ever. He *believes all things written* in the Old Testament Scriptures, and it is just because he does so that he is a Christian. *If they* really *believed Moses, they* also (like him) *would have believed Christ.*

The true revelation of God, my brethren, is never at variance with itself. Everything which God has ever spoken, is true still, and will be true for ever. His voice in nature, His voice in reason, His voice in conscience; His voice to the Patriarchs, His voice in the Law, His voice in the prophets, His voice in the Gospel; are all, in reality, consistent and harmonious. Each one of these adds something, completes something, fulfils something, in the one before it; but it destroys and it contradicts nothing. The education of the world, like the education of the man, is indeed progressive: some things are taught in type and shadow then, in plainness and in substance now: some things are given as commands at one time, as principles and reasons later: some things are kept back from one age, because it could not bear, because it is unprepared for them, and communicated to an age that follows: nay, our Lord Himself tells us, that some things in the Mosaic Dispensation were allowed, *for the hardness of men's hearts*, which neither were so *from the beginning*, nor are left so in the *dispensation of the fulness of times*. Is not this just the system of a wise parent,

adapting his disclosures of knowledge, and even (in some respects) his requirements of duty, to the age in years, and to the moral stature, of the son whose eventual perfection is his object? Yet, none the less for these qualifications, the God of the Christian Apostle was the God of the Israelite fathers: and *all things written in the Law and the Prophets*, when the interpreting light of a more perfect day is thrown back upon them from the Gospel, are believed still in the Church of Christ, forming at once the basis and the complement of the faith delivered in Christianity to the saints. He who affects, unlike St Paul, to despise the Old Testament Scriptures, proves himself by that contempt to be not a full-grown man but a very babe in Christ. *Let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

6. We have reached now that latest portion of the text, in which St Paul claims for Israel under the Law a glimmering at least of that *hope*, for which, as a Christian and an Apostle, he was himself *bound with his chain. I have hope*, he says, *toward God*, a hope *which these men*, my accusers, *themselves also accept, that there shall be* hereafter *a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*

It was Christ, he says in one of his Epistles, who *brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.* And any one who seeks his proofs of immortality in the Pentateuch, or even in the Prophets, is going back from the surer to the more doubtful, from the plainer to the more ambiguous. Yet St Paul says that for those who lived before Christ there was such a hope; the hope of an immortal existence, basing itself upon the specific words or upon the general sense of Scripture. Because the Pharisees held the doctrine of the existence of spirit, and of the general Resurrection, he condescends to say himself, as he stands before the council, *Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee.* And One greater than St Paul answered the infidel Sadducee, upon this very tenet, out of the pages of the Old Testament; saying, *Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: for He is not a God of the dead, but of the*

living: and that is not the life of man, which is the life but of one half of man: a disembodied soul wants an essential part of the integrity of man's life: if a man is to live for ever, he must live as the whole of a man: there must be a resurrection of the body, as well as an immortality of the soul.

It suited the occasion and the purpose of this heroic defence, to trace the hope of the Resurrection to a Dispensation earlier than the Christian. And we too must accept the declaration, and give thanks for it, that even the Old Testament is not silent as to this great *refreshing* and *restitution of all things.* We can read still in those sacred pages the burst of human trust and of Divine Inspiration with which prophets and righteous men asserted their personal expectation along with the predicted glory of Him that should come. Though not for himself alone, nor for himself most literally, yet surely for himself also, David (to take one familiar instance) says in the 16th Psalm, *My flesh also shall rest in hope; for Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell...In Thy presence is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.* And Isaiah, in words to which one interpretation only can be given, *Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise: Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.*

7. But it is still more important for us to observe the terms in which the Resurrection is here spoken of, and to ask how far we ourselves can enter into them.

It might have been a natural, though a false, view of the Resurrection, to confine it to the revival of the Christian. *The resurrection of the just* is an expression used by our Lord, and to that extent at least His disciples would readily have accepted it. *Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.* But He stopped not there, nor can His Church stop there, in the enunciation of this stupendous mystery. *The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice*—the voice of the Son of Man—*and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the*

resurrection of damnation. I saw the dead, says the Apostle who recorded that saying of his Master, *I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God...And the sea gave up the dead which were in it: and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.* There is a resurrection of the unjust, as well as a resurrection of the just. The prospect before none of us is annihilation. Gladly would the sinner exchange that neutral, negative, insensate doom, for *the worm* that *dieth not, and the fire* that *is not quenched.* But not such is the alternative before us. An immortality of blessedness or of misery is the prospect of that world into which *sin* once *entered, and death by sin.*

The words themselves are alarming: who shall paint the thing signified?

And yet St Paul calls it a hope. I *have hope toward God*, &c. My friends, the Resurrection must be either the hope, or the fear, of each one of us. And which? which of the two? a hope, or a fear? for you? for me?

We are in danger of having all Christian doctrine washed out and washed away. The expectation of the Resurrection is no longer (practically) the expectation of Christians. They look rather for a reunion with departed friends in a state almost independent of Gospel faith and Gospel holiness. They have begun to dream of a change begun and ended in death, such as shall transform the earthly into the heavenly, the sensual and the devilish into the spiritual and the Godlike. We want bringing back to the primitive touchstone: Art thou just, or art thou unjust? Such, for thee, will be the Resurrection. Art thou now *washed and justified and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God?* Then shalt thou be at the right hand in the great gathering. Then shall the King say to thee, *Come, thou blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world.* Then shalt thou be *numbered among the children of God, and* thy *lot* shall be *among the saints.* Then is the Resurrection to thee a hope, not a fear: a bright and blessed reversal of all earth's sorrows,

not a bewilderment and a condemnation and a torture for ever.

But art thou still living in sin? Is the world still thy god? Art thou athirst for its pleasures, its riches, its honours? Is the flesh still thy master? Does it rule thee with a rod of iron, bidding thee take thy fill of sense, bidding thee sin, and sin on, and sin on, though thou die for it? Is thine eye set upon things below, counting nothing so bright or so desirable as the smile of man that shall die, the applause of the son of man that shall soon be as the dust from which he was taken? Then hast thou altogether forfeited the Christian hope, and must take in its stead the world's terror. For thee the Resurrection must be an expectation, but it cannot be a hope; a horrible dread, not a soothing comfort.

God grant us that *mind which was in Christ Jesus; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.* Then shall all sorrow, all pain, all loneliness, all distress, be as nothing; and the future, the long, the eternal future, be all in all. Then shall we be able to say, *Come loss, come sorrow, come bereavement, come solitude; only be mine the hope of the faithful, mine at last the resurrection of the just.*

LECTURE XIV.

CONSCIENCE.

Acts xxiv. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

Every word is weighty. *Conscience—a conscience void of offence—offence toward God and toward men—I exercise myself, herein, to have it so*—these are the elements of our grave subject. We must first separate, and then combine them.

1. The keynote of the whole sentence is that word conscience. What is conscience?

It has been sometimes defined as *a moral memory*. But it is more. Conscience has to do not with the past only, though with it chiefly. In that sense poets and moralists have dwelt finely and sternly upon its operations. *This is twice living, to enjoy life past;* to be able to reflect upon the days that are gone, with satisfaction and with self-approval. On the other hand, *The first and foremost punishment of sinners is to have sinned: fortune may adorn a crime with her gifts, as if protecting and vindicating it; but it goes not unpunished, since the scourge of the crime is in the crime itself.* In such applications, conscience is a moral memory.

But it is more. Conscience, the word I mean, denotes a *fellow-knowledge;* a knowledge shared with another, and yet that other oneself. St Paul says, in one of his Epistles, *I know nothing by myself:* it is properly *with myself:* I have no fellow-knowledge with myself of anything to be ashamed of. That

fellow-knowledge is conscience. Conscience is a man's privity to his own conduct, in thought and word and deed. Out of this all its workings and all its effects spring. *I know with myself.* I am so made that I cannot help this fellow-knowledge. I must, perforce, take cognizance of my own actions, and sit in judgment upon my own secret thoughts. This is conscience.

The word conscience occurs more than thirty times in the New Testament, and of these more than twenty are in St Paul's unquestioned writings.

(1) It is to the conscience of man that he says he addresses his Gospel. *By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* Let each man's fellow-knowledge, each man's privity to himself, feel, as he listens to my Gospel, that it is a word of truth and soberness; a word worthy of God, and a word wholesome for man. *We are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.*

(2) To his own conscience he appeals for testimony. *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness,* bearing witness with me, *in the Holy Ghost.* His own fellow-knowledge, his own introspection, his privity to himself, assures him of sincerity, of perfect truthfulness, in that which he is about to utter.

(3) He speaks more than once of a good conscience. *I have lived,* he says of himself before the council, *in all good conscience before God until this day.* He bids his friend to *hold faith and a good conscience;* and adds that some, having parted with the latter, have made shipwreck also upon the other. The deacon must be one who in like manner, *holds the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.* The fellow-knowledge, the self-privity, must be good, must be pure—clean and not defiled—if a man would keep a firm hold even upon sound doctrine.

(4) In other places he speaks of a weak conscience; of one whose self-judgment is timid and overscrupulous, unenlightened as to the extent of his Christian freedom, but who yet, while it is

so, must respect and follow it, at the risk of losing altogether the guidance of the one inward light of man.

(5) On the other hand, St Paul tells of an evil or bad conscience; of a self-knowledge which is a knowledge of evil, testifying to the inmost being of sins done and sins unrepented of, creating a discord within, and raising an impassable barrier between man and God.

(6) And so, step by step, we reach that which St Paul describes, in his Epistle to Titus, as a defiled conscience; a self-knowledge which is privy not only to particular acts of transgression, but to a thorough choice and love of evil. *Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

(7) From these there is but a step, if one, to the state described as characteristic of some in the latter times, who *have their conscience seared with a hot iron;* actually branded and cauterized with an obdurate and an indelible mark and stain of evil. *Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.* From that last and most fearful condition may God in His infinite mercy save all who hear me.

2. Now the conscience which St Paul here describes himself as striving after is one *void of offence.* The exact word is *free from stumbling-blocks.* It is applied to a smooth and level road which presents no obstacles for the traveller to stumble over. St Paul desires to have a conscience, or self-privity, free from stones or rocks with which the man might come into collision as he traverses the past or treads the present of his life. The figure is most expressive. He does not speak here of preserving his life from stumbling, but his conscience: not therefore of the act or the word or the idea of evil, but rather of the effect of such things upon his self-cognizance, upon his inward view and review, upon his feeling and his consciousness as he looks

behind or within. He is determined, God helping him by the grace of His Holy Spirit, that his introspection, his perpetual judgment upon himself, shall not find itself impeded and embarrassed in its course by stumbling-blocks of evil done and good left undone; shall not trip here over a hasty or uncharitable word, and there over a neglected duty, and there over an injured soul, and there over a corrupt or polluting imagination: the straight and smooth and unstained surface of the life and soul shall present nothing for the self-cognizance to dash against as an upbraiding, accusing, or condemning object. This is the figure. The conscience, not the life only, must be kept void of offence. He would be able to say, *I know nothing by* (*against*) *myself.*

3. And he adds that there are two chief departments of this unstumbling conscience; corresponding to the two great divisions of human duty. *A conscience void of offence, toward God, and toward man.* When the thought of God is presented, the self-judgment is not staggered: and when the thought of man is presented, still the self-cognizance, the inward privity, is not beset by monuments of reproach or evil.

We are speaking of great things here. Where is he amongst us who can bear the application of St Paul's test?

Some men are not afraid of the second table. Like the rich young ruler in the Gospel, they can stand up before Christ, and say, *All these commandments have I observed from my youth.* They have done no harm, they can say it sometimes on a death-bed, to any man: their conscience is clear. It is not a good sign, this confidence: dying Christians generally express themselves quite differently: they feel themselves sinners, and their hope is fixed on a Saviour of sinners. But at least when the attention of the inward judge is turned to the first table—to that law which bids man love the Lord his God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength—then surely the self-deceiver will be unmasked to himself: the conscience is not void of offence: its course, as it bears the case, is not smooth but stumbling: God has not been loved with half the love bestowed

upon self and upon the creature: and the verdict must be, *Yet lackest thou one thing;* and that *one thing lacking* was *the one thing needful.*

4. I hasten to St Paul's account of his own effort after the attainment of this clear, this unstumbling conscience. *Herein*, he says before Felix, his unscrupulous and immoral judge, *herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence.*

Herein. In this matter, of the faith and the hope avowed in the preceding sentence; a faith based upon the old Scriptures, and the hope of a general resurrection. St Paul's faith was not an indolent taking for granted: his hope was not a listless waiting for a prize of which he was certain: that resurrection which was the hope of Israel, which is the hope of the Church, stirred him to perpetual efforts, and reconciled him to a severe self-discipline. *In this matter I exercise myself;* or, more exactly, *I myself also*, I, who might be thought safe of it, I, who might be considered as placed by my call and my Apostleship above the risk of failing or falling short of glory, *I myself also exercise.*

The word is remarkable. It is the term applied to the training of an athlete. It expresses that long course of discipline by which alone a man could be prepared for a gymnastic feat. *Every man that striveth for the mastery*, every man who engages in an athletic contest, *is temperate*, exercises self-control and self-discipline, *in all things. I train myself to have a conscience void of offence.*

We are apt to think that, whatever other difficulties the Apostles had to contend with, they had none within. We know that they were exposed to perpetual privations, persecutions, and sufferings: but we take it for granted that their enemies were all outward, and that a constant and even rapturous devotion secured to them an entire immunity from what we feel to be the greatest difficulties and the worst dangers of a Christian life.

How strongly does St Paul combat this error! Hear him as he writes to the Corinthians, using the figure so familiar

to his readers from the spectacle of their Isthmian games. *I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I keep under my body*—the word is far stronger in the original—*I buffet my body*—I meet it day by day, as it were, in pugilistic encounter—*and bring it into subjection* (*servitude*); *lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* Could any language express more forcibly the identity of his daily struggle with that of the commonest man? His nature was our nature; the cravings of his body as imperious, the rovings of his fancy as capricious, the desires of his mind as eager, as our own: some troubles he had, and some temptations, even greater and more obstinate than ours: and while he had daily to lead others to the battle, he was compelled to engage in it himself for life or death. It did not come naturally to him to have a conscience void of offence. He had to train himself for it, by daily buffetings of his own body, mortifications of his own inclination, and crucifixions of his own will. The hope of a glorious resurrection bore him up, and in Christ's strength he went forward *conquering and to conquer.*

The subject is its own application.

(1) *Ye see your calling, brethren.* The Christian life is not easy. St Paul found it a severe life. He had to train for it. He had to fight with his own body day by day. His enemy was (in one sense, though not in another) flesh and blood. He knew what weariness was, what languor was, what an ailing body was, what a lonely saddened spirit was, what a *hardly bestead* and tempted heart was. We must be men, if we would be Christians. While we call in the arm of grace, we must also *lift up the hands which hang down, and* confirm *the feeble knees.* The Christian conflict is not a dream: it is a reality. Every one is against us, except One. The flesh is against us; making duty a daily difficulty, and nature itself a daily snare. The world is against us; our own little world —small and insignificant, but not weak for us—the world of our own acquaintance, our own household, our own nearest

and most chosen friends. All, in their own way, are a snare to us; either making heaven less real, or the world more real, than it would be without them. But what then? Brave men are only roused by difficulties: if the Gospel demands courage, it is all the more a Gospel for men. Ours is no languid, dreamy, delicious religion; lying still now, and to rest for ever then! It is a religion of activity, of enterprise, of ambition; a religion which wears armour, and which wields weapons, and which points onwards to a crown. In the very same degree it is a religion which takes men as they are, and which offers to make them what they ought to be. *I train myself*, St Paul says, for my high calling.

(2) Secondly, and most obviously, learn the place of conscience in the Christian scheme. It is not enough for a man to be what is commonly called a conscientious man. Cornelius was that, and more, before his conversion. St Paul was that, and more, before his conversion. Yet the one must send men to Joppa for one who should tell him words of salvation. And the other must see Jesus Christ Himself, showing him to his own heart as *the chief of sinners*, and then disclosing to him *a more excellent way*. But though obedience to conscience (apart from Christ) is not salvation, yet there is thus much of connection and continuity between a life before and a life after conversion, that it is still conscience which guides, only conscience itself has widened its field of vision and gained a new criterion of judgment. The revelation of Christ and the revelation of the Spirit make it a matter of conscience to trust in the One and to seek the other. When St Paul wrote, after his conversion, *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence*: it meant something different from what he could have said equally before his conversion, *I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*. The latter was consistent with the persecution of the Church: the former had as its first principle affiance in Christ and devotion to His service. And yet, in the one as in the other, conscience was the guide; dark in the one state, light in the

other. A man is not a conscientious man now, unless Christ, as well as God, *is in all his thoughts.*

(3) I speak to some this evening who have not yet sullied the transparency of conscience. They have in them, indeed, the taint of the original Adam: and they have acted that defilement (who has not?) in definite transgression. The youngest child here present has sinned: how much more we who are children no longer! Still there is a difference, and a marked difference, between the conscientious and the wicked, between those who regard duty, and those who heed not the voice and the light within them. How can I express, as St Paul here teaches us, the importance of attending to conscience? O, it is a sensitive and a delicate thing, this gift of human self privity and self-cognizance and self-judgment! In early day it speaks and is heard: a little disobedience, a little untruthfulness, a little selfishness and ill temper, will lie like a leaden weight upon the young conscience: it cannot rest without confession, it can scarcely forgive itself even when forgiven. Look on but a few years, and the child who trembled at an undutiful word, is a young man who can *make a mock at sin.* He has gone from step to step, first in the knowledge, then in the tolerance, at last in the touching and tasting and handling of evil: and now a sin which ought to lay him in the dust is done and remembered and jested at and revelled in: conscience has lost its edge: it *stumbles* not at the grossest form of evil. This instrument, this measure, this test, of right and wrong, may be spoilt, may be ruined, by careless and irreverent handling: and what is a man then? What is a ship without a rudder, or a mind without reason and without soul? I say then, to all here present who are either too young, or else too thoughtful, to have yet thrown away their compass, See that nothing tempt you to go against conscience. If a thing seems to you to be wrong, flee from it. If you have fallen into it unawares, confess, forsake, abjure it. If something within says to you, *This is right*, let nothing induce you to swerve from it. *Keep innocency,*

and take heed unto the thing that is right: for this shall bring a man peace at the last.

(4) Finally, it is too much to suppose that every member of the congregation can take to himself the last exhortation. A Christian minister cannot address himself only to the innocent. He has a Gospel for the sinful, or he would be a traitor to his Lord. *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* Let my latest thought this night be for those who may be amongst us with what the Scripture calls a bad conscience: men and women who may have within them tonight a restless spirit, an accusing voice, ringing in their inward ear a knell of reproach, and making their heart sink with what an Apostle has called *a certain fearful looking for of judgment.* Let me take from the Word of God last quoted an augury of hope for these. *Having our hearts*, it is written, *sprinkled from an evil conscience.* Do you feel that you have sinned? Has this last week witnessed your fall? Have you begun to say within yourself, *It is in vain? I resolve in vain, I struggle in vain, I pray in vain: let me alone: I must work out my destiny, and sink like lead in the mighty waters?* Yes, there are here, in this place tonight, immortal souls thus desponding: and probably the text of this Sermon, and many of its details, have rather daunted than elevated them: now therefore at its close I place those inspired, those inspiring words of the Apostle to the Hebrews, and say, Get *your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.* And do you say, Wherewith? I answer from the same Epistle, With *the blood of Jesus;* even that precious blood, which *cleanseth from all sin.* Yes, to this end Christ died, that He might *purge your conscience from dead works*, and so set you free *to serve the living God.* Put not from you that hope. There is no man who kneels before God as a sinner, self-accusing, self-condemning, self-despairing, who may not look upwards to the mercy-seat in heaven, and say, *For Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive me* ALL *that is past.* It may be great sin, it may be foul sin, it may be presumptuous

sin: *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from* ALL *sin.* Get your heart sprinkled from an evil conscience by faith in the universal propitiation. And then start afresh. Go forth from God's presence as a forgiven man, to live and to act upon that forgiveness. And if you fall again, come back again. Never will you cease to want that sprinkling—and never will the power of that sprinkling be worn out—until you are out of reach of temptation, out of reach of the world and of the flesh and of the devil for ever. This is not Antinomian doctrine: this is the doctrine in which resides the very hope of holiness, and its reality, and its humility, and its blessedness. Let no man say, *My conscience is defiled past redemption:* such language is treason against the cross of Christ. Let no man say, *My conscience is seared past feeling:* if it were so, you would not know and you would not feel it. Still is the living *fountain open for sin and for uncleanness:* still may all who will, gather around that sacred spring, and buy there forgiveness and sanctification *without money and without price.*

LECTURE XV.

STIFLED CONVICTIONS.

Acts xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

It is always interesting, as well as instructive, to see Christianity brought face to face with heathenism. More especially, to see a Christian prisoner brought to trial before a heathen judge; brought to trial for being a Christian; for having turned aside from Judaism into Christianity; from what the judge regards as a despicable superstition, into something yet more contemptible and degraded still. We can see the smile of disdain with which the whole controversy is listened to. *When the accusers stood up*, says one of these judges, *they brought none accusation against him of such things as I supposed; but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.* The great example itself was ever reenacted: the bewilderment of Pontius Pilate, who had to decide, at a moment's notice, that strangest and most momentous of all cases, when the Son of God Himself stood at the bar of a human judge, is seen over again in every one of these trials; the half misgiving that something deeper than his knowledge may be involved, struggling with the hardened and scoffing indifference which has learned to treat all religions as alike convenient and alike untrue.

Even thus was it here. Antonius Felix, once a slave, now a ruler; a profligate, an oppressor, and an assassin; is brought, for once in his life, face to face with the Gospel. We have heard the opening of the defence. St Paul, offering to the Roman magistrate no hollow compliments, yet paying the respect due to his office, has congratulated himself on standing before a judge who is no stranger to the circumstances to which he appeals in his defence. A nine years' acquaintance with the country will enable Felix to understand the bearing of points which might otherwise have seemed irrelevant. It is now only twelve days since he went up to Jerusalem; a short time—considering how a large part of it has been occupied, in a journey to Cæsarea as a prisoner—a short time for the commission of the triple crime with which he is charged; sedition, heresy, and sacrilege. His object in coming up to Jerusalem was *to worship;* to be present at one of the three great annual festivals of the Jewish religion. He was also on an errand of charity. He *came to bring alms to his nation and offerings.* He had been engaged for many months (as we learn from several of his Epistles) in making a collection among the Gentile Churches for the support of the poor and suffering in Judea. At Jerusalem, so far from offering any insult to the established religion, he had even consented to go through a rite of purification according to the Jewish Law. That was the object of his presence in the Temple. *They found me purified in the Temple, neither with multitude nor with tumult.* And where, he asks, are the witnesses? A goodly array of prosecutors: but where are *the Jews from Asia* on whose evidence they rely? No; his real crime is not apostasy from the faith of his fathers; not irreverence towards the ritual or the religion of his nation; but on the very contrary, a strict adherence to a hope which that nation has forgotten, though its own Scriptures record it; the hope of a resurrection of the dead, built upon the attested fact that the promised Messiah has Himself risen.

Such is the substance of the defence. Two points in it have already secured by their importance a separate consideration;

(1) St Paul's doctrine of a twofold resurrection; and (2) St Paul's perpetual self-discipline to have a conscience void of offence.

But by this time the cold impartiality of the magistrate, set to decide between what he regards as rival tenets of two sects of a superstitious religion, has satisfied itself that there is either no case against the prisoner, or certainly no urgency in its adjudication. Let both parties wait. *When Lysias the chief captain shall come down*, by whose authority the prisoner was sent to Cæsarea, Felix will resume the hearing. Meanwhile there need be no severity of treatment. Paul may have all freedom that is compatible with his detention, and may see any of his friends who care to visit him. But Felix went further. In this interval he *sent for Paul*, and, in company with his wife Drusilla, who, whatever her conduct, was still by profession as well as by birth a Jewess, *heard him concerning the faith in Christ*. It is at this point that the words of the text occur.

1. First then, what subjects did St Paul select as those most appropriate to his hearers? *He reasoned* (or *discoursed*) *concerning righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come.*

Many persons would have expected him to go at once to the Gospel; to open before these sinners, in their day of confidence and of unconcern, the blessed prospect of a free forgiveness, an entire sanctification, and everlasting life. We hear much said against what is called moral preaching. And certainly a moral Sermon may be a miserably dry and lifeless thing. And a Sermon which leaves Christ out of sight *must* be a dry and lifeless thing to a Christian congregation. But a moral Sermon need not leave Christ out of sight. A moral Sermon may be most deeply Christian. And, let me say, a moral Sermon—which knows its place, and desires to be as the *schoolmaster unto Christ*—may be powerfully awakening. Many a careless heart, which treads underfoot the precious pearl of the Gospel, has been shaken to its foundation by the exhibition of moral consequences, by that reasoning which shows the wrath of God against sin, and reiterates in the inward ear the solemn admonition, *Be sure your sin will find you out.* There are first

elements of universal truth, which must be declared, and must be enforced, and must be felt, before even the announcement of a Saviour can by possibility be valued. And it is just because we have learned these first principles so imperfectly, so confusedly, or so superficially, that our own course has been oftentimes so vague and inconsistent, our appreciation of the Gospel so inadequate, our love of Christ Himself so faint and cold and dead.

To a heathen governor, a cruel and licentious as well as unbelieving man, St Paul could not without folly have begun by proclaiming the fulness and freeness of the grace of Christ. There was as yet no accusing conscience at work within, to make the promise of forgiveness acceptable or indeed intelligible. It would have been indeed a *casting of pearls before swine*, a *giving that which is holy unto the dogs*, to tell a man, in the moral state of Felix, of a God who *passes by iniquity, transgression, and sin*, and *keeps mercy for thousands* of the fallen. St Paul began at the other end of truth. He sought to lay a deep foundation, rather than to rear on the sand a showy superstructure. He selected three topics for this first discourse.

(1) He spoke of *righteousness*. Righteousness, in this sense, is the giving to all their due. It is the fulfilling of every relation in which we stand to others. It is the being a perfectly faithful son or father, brother or sister, husband or wife, subject or ruler, servant or master, or whatever else we may be, by duty and position, towards any other living person; yea, and towards God also. What a subject for discourse—how large, how deep, how instructive, how condemning! St Paul no doubt told Felix (as he had told him, by implication, in his earlier defence) that he had a monitor within, a natural conscience, telling him, in the great leading features at least, what was his bounden duty in every particular of inward and outward, of domestic and public life. His conscience told him that, when he tempted away the wife Drusilla from her husband Azizus king of Emesa, he was doing a wicked and a criminal act, for which, sooner or later, an account was to be rendered. His conscience told him that, when he brought about the murder of Jonathan the high priest

because he was offended with his unwelcome counsels, he was doing a treacherous and a barbarous act, for which, sooner or later, he must expect to give account. He was violating, in every such case, one of those relations in which God, the universal Creator and the universal Judge, had placed him towards his brother men. In enunciating to him the first principles of morality in this one respect, St Paul was laying a deep and solid foundation for whatever he might afterwards have to say to him of the Gospel. So long as conscience was either asleep or silent upon such topics, there was no room for the safe or salutary entrance of a Gospel of forgiveness and Divine grace.

Would to God, my brethren, that this part of St Paul's address to Felix were wholly superfluous in a place calling itself Christian! Which of us needs not, in some particular, the trumpet-call to righteousness? to a fulfilment of life's relations? to a *rendering to all their dues*, and even *to God the things that are God's?* Where is he amongst us, who is so without sin, in these first elements of faithfulness, that he could dare to cast the first stone at another? And yet we write ourselves Christians, and think that all we can need now is the consolation of the Gospel.

St Paul reasoned of righteousness.

(2) He went on to temperance. The word is important in its most obvious sense. O the miserable homes, O the yet more miserable hearts, in this town, at this moment, by reason of this one want, the want of temperance! Intemperance, as we commonly use that word, is of all vices the most degrading. It levels man with the beasts that perish: nay, far more, far worse, than this; for the brute creation obeys instinct, and instinct points to use, not to abuse. But the word temperance, as now used, falls below the meaning of the word employed by St Paul. That of which St Paul reasoned with Felix was the larger virtue of self-restraint, of self-command, generally. He taught him—still occupying the ground rather of nature and reason than of Revelation and the Gospel—that every man ought to be able to command himself; to say *No* to appetite when it passes its just

limit; to bridle inclination; to coerce lust; to say to himself, *This I will do, because it is right*, and, *This will I not do, because it is wrong*. This is temperance. It is the holding of the reins of conduct in the hand of the will, and the regulating of that will itself by the ordinance of reason and of God. The absence of this power, or the loss of it, is the cause of all the sins and of all the miseries which have made this world a scene of suffering and of desolation.

And yet, my brethren, I must again ask, even in a Christian congregation, which of us all holds the reins of action in his own hand, and guides them as religion or even as reason prompts? Alas, the weakness, the bondage, of the will is the very malady from which man suffers. *We cannot do the things that we would:* we are the slaves of another, even of that watchful, that ever restless enemy, who desires not our happiness but our ruin, and uses our own selves to work it out for each of us. Let us examine the question, each one of us, with reference either to the organs of our own body or to the faculties of our own mind, and too many of us must confess, with Felix, that we are not our own masters; that we have not the absolute control either of thought or speech or act, but do every day things that we would not, and leave undone the things that we would.

St Paul reasoned of temperance.

(3) And then to one thus self-condemned; thus lying under the double charge of violating the relations of life in a thousand instances both of omission and of act, and also of having dropped the reins of the inner being, and forfeited that self-control which is the very life of man's life; the Apostle, advancing one step further, utters that terrible message, which the conscience within instantly re-echoes, of a judgment and a wrath to come. It may be doubted whether the expectation of a judgment is more a point of natural or of revealed religion. Certainly, if Revelation declares, conscience ratifies. Conscience reads in the revelation the confirmation of its own misgivings, and *sets to its seal that God is true*. The very scheme of this world, as we see it apart from Revelation, would be most imperfect, utterly incomprehensible,

without a judgment. There must be some future rectification of existing inequalities: there must be some state or some time in which the neglect of God, and the defiance of God, shall reap its fruits; in which the sufferings of His servants shall be redressed, and the triumphings of the wicked discomfited. But that truth which seems to us, in the retrospect, to have been an instinct and an intuition is at least revealed and attested in the Gospel. *God hath appointed a day*, St Paul said before the Areopagus at Athens, *in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.*

2. Such was the discourse of St Paul in this first interview with Felix. And what was its effect? *As he discoursed of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

Felix trembled. The magistrate, the judge, the oppressor, the profligate; before the prisoner, the powerless, the despised, but the man of God. Yes, the truth has great power. The voice of God, whether it be the voice of God in the Law or in the Gospel, in conscience or in Revelation, has great power. Men wonder it has not more. If it were indeed God's voice, they say, it must have more. Doubtless it has often a hindrance in the human utterer. He presses it not as he ought: he exemplifies it not as he ought: he even utters it not as he ought. A poor, confused, lifeless thing is all that reaches the congregation from what ought to be the very storehouse of God's oracles: and he who takes the life out of it in his preaching takes also the power out of it in his life. And thus the Gospel has oftentimes not even a chance. But it is very wonderful—it is a mark, I must think, of its Divine origin—that it has the power it has. Think what the strength of resistance to it might be expected to be. Think what the influences of time and sense are: think what it is to be surrounded by a gay and giddy world: think what it is to have every energy tasked to the uttermost in the discharge of business

or in the pursuit of pleasure: think what it is to have passions clamouring within for their gratification, and making it the direct interest of a human soul to forget God, to deny Christ, to disbelieve eternity: and then wonder only—for it is indeed a cause for wonder—not that the Gospel has so little power, but that it has so much; wonder that so considerable an influence is exercised by it over human conduct; wonder, not less, that so many, who do not obey, fear the Gospel; that so many, as the minister of Christ reasons with them of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come, still, like Felix, tremble.

But this trembling is not a certain sign of good. It admits of being (as a Prophet has said) *healed slightly*. Many have trusted in the trembling. They have had convictions, they say, and they take conviction for conversion, and conversion for the whole of grace. They lay all the stress upon the having trembled. It made the Gospel pleasant to them: they *received it with joy:* and there the work ended. Alas, it was but begun. Little do they know of the Christian life, with its joys and sorrows, its turnings and windings, its falls and risings again, its anxieties, its ambiguities, its continual precariousness: they expected to arrive without a journey, to win without a race, to conquer without a battle.

Felix trembled. But he found a short way—a way often trodden—to relief and respite. He said to the Apostle, *For the present go thy way: when* (or *if*) *I get an opportunity, I will summon thee.* Thus he cut short the pain which he would not make remedial: and when he next met his teacher, a meaner thought had taken possession: *he sent for him*, but it was in the hope that he would give him money; that the prisoner might fee his judge for freeing him: and with such a motive at work, no wonder that the charm of the Gospel was counteracted: the sordid desire of gain, and from such a source, could not coexist with any aspiration after heaven: his chance was gone; forfeited by himself and sinned away. He proceeded on his downward course. Soon he was summoned to give an account to his imperial master of his unfaithful, his dishonest stewardship.

And then he and his instructor parted, we must suppose, for ever: the light had gleamed once upon his path, but it now died away, and left the darkness thicker yet and gloomier and more hopeless than before.

It is a true parable. Every man has his opportunity; and if he misses it, it comes not again. Ours is the present: let us grasp it, and use it, and live by it, while we may.

Felix vanishes from the page of Inspiration: yet has his converse with the man of God left an impress upon that page for ever, and thousands and tens of thousands owe their first convictions to the record of his opportunity and of his obduracy.

Dare we hope, my friends, that all of us have listened and feared? have felt conscience pricked and stirred within, and have not, like Felix, deferred to act upon conviction? Which of us all has never said to the troublesome admonition, outward or from within; to the monitor, visible or invisible, who uttered it; *Go thy way for this time?* Has no Sermon ever sounded in our hearts with convincing force, and yet we have gone away to forget, to trifle with it, and to disobey? How have we reckoned upon prolonged life, upon renewed and repeated opportunities of fetching back at will the discarded rebuker or exhorter! *When I get an opportunity, I will summon thee. Not now; not now: I am busy, I am at ease, I am indisposed, I am unfit: I have bought a piece of ground, I have married a wife: the occupations of life, or the cares of life, the affections of life, or the pleasures of life, are too strong for me at present: but soon perhaps the opportunity will come: I shall be less busy, or I shall be less happy, or I shall be less prosperous, or I shall be less careworn: perhaps I shall be sorrowful some day; perhaps some day I shall be sick: then will I call for thee.* Yes, so it is: such is the tale of life throughout its generations. *Soon, but not now: not while time is ours; not while it can do any good to listen; not while it might guide the life, while it might mitigate care, while it might counteract or overbear temptation: but some day, some fancied day, when I shall be ill, and yet not too ill—when death will be in sight, and yet at some distance—then will I turn to God: tomorrow, not*

today; peradventure, not for certain: no, not for certain; for what is certain on earth save the moment that is? Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Be sure that whatever awakens a serious thought in us, even for a moment, is a voice from God; and that to trifle with it, or to delay acting upon it, is to trifle and to procrastinate with God. Be sure too, that, in what form soever the call come to us, whether as a warning or as an invitation, whether as a reproof for sin or a promise of blessing, it is equally in either case, if we will listen to it, a call of love, and he who puts it away or puts it off puts away or puts off his own happiness.

God grant that this may not be a last opportunity, and a lost opportunity, for any of us. How many such opportunities has God already given to each one of us! Nothing can bring back to us those that have been wasted: let not this one be wasted too.

LECTURE XVI.

THE SINNER HIS OWN ENEMY.

Acts xxvi. 14.

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Porcius Festus succeeded Antonius Felix in the government of Judæa. Two years already had St Paul been a prisoner at Cæsarea: and the change of governor made no immediate change in his condition or circumstances. He seems, however, to have passed from the hands of a magistrate at once immoral, mean, and unprincipled, into those of an equitable and not unamiable man, desirous to protect him from violence, and to recognise the rights of his citizenship. After three days spent at Cæsarea, the seat of the civil government, Festus paid a visit to Jerusalem; the centre of chief interest, in reference alike to the history and to the religion of the remarkable people over which he was set to rule. There he was beset by applications regarding the case of St Paul. The unsleeping malice of the Jewish persecutors, hoping something from the inexperience of a new governor, planned a petition for the prisoner's removal from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, as if for a further and more convenient hearing; in reality with a view to his assassination by the way. Festus could see no reason for the change of place. The accusers might accompany him to Cæsarea in a few days, and there he would investigate the case without delay.

But this renewed trial ended like the former. A number of

unproved charges were brought against the prisoner: charges, as before—to judge by the answer—of crimes against the Law of Moses, against the Temple, and against the Emperor; in other words, of heresy, of sacrilege, and of treason. But the utterance of the charmed words, *I appeal unto Cæsar*, transferred the case from the subordinate to the highest tribunal: a Roman citizen had claimed to be heard before the Roman Emperor: and Festus, after some conference with his assessors on the only possible question—whether there was anything in the particular case to exempt it from the operation of the general rule—closed the matter by the decisive judgment, *Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.* The prisoner was remanded into custody, until an opportunity should occur for sending him to Rome.

In the interval Festus was visited by a person well qualified, by position and education, to throw some light upon a case full of perplexities for Festus. King Agrippa, a great grandson of Herod the Great; son of that Herod whose persecution of the Church and whose mysterious end are related in the 12th chapter; arrived at Cæsarea with his sister Bernice: and after many days—for the despised Christian prisoner must wait till there was nothing else to be spoken of—*when they had been there many days*, Festus mentioned Paul's case to his illustrious guest, and described the difficulty which he had found in bringing to it an intelligent judgment. *When the accusers stood up, they brought against him none accusation of such things as I supposed; but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.* The curiosity of Agrippa was awakened by the description. *I would also*, he said, *hear the man myself.*

I fear we must divest our minds of all traditional interest in the character of this king Agrippa. He was a cold-hearted voluptuary. His long life—for he lived till Trajan's reign; outlived by many years the fall of Jerusalem; outlived all but one, if not every one, of the Apostles presents no point on which the Christian eye can fasten with hope or with satisfac-

tion. The character of the *almost persuaded*, of the *almost Christian*, however common, finds (as we shall hereafter see) no real type in him. Roman satirists are busy with the terrible scandals of his private character. If he knew, if (as St Paul says) he believed, the Prophets, it was the worse for him. If he knew, he did not.

And the life of his companion who shall describe? The briefest summary is the most decent. Bernice was first married to her uncle, Herod king of Chalcis. After his death she lived under circumstances of great suspicion with her own brother, this king Agrippa. She was a second time married, to Polemon, king of Cilicia; but soon left him, and returned to her brother. She afterwards lived, in unholy union, with the Emperor Vespasian, and with his son, the Emperor Titus.

These were the people before whom St Paul was here called, to make his defence. Strange, marvellous contrast, between the prisoner and the judges! It was needful to indicate it, that we might understand the full meaning of that courtesy, of that patience, of that earnestness, with which the cause is pleaded and the subsequent dialogue maintained.

Festus summons Paul before Agrippa, that he may have something to say in his despatch to Nero. Agrippa would wile away an hour of a somewhat tedious visit by listening to a curious story. The profligate Bernice, worthy sister to the adulteress Drusilla of whom we read in the 24th chapter, would display her vanity before a distinguished concourse, and amuse herself with a tale of sufferings in which she has no concern. Paul alone of all that assembly has a clear purpose in this life, and a bright hope in regard to that which is to come.

With the same truthful courtesy which we noticed in him before Felix, he begins by acknowledging the competence of his principal hearer. King Agrippa knows by long use the customs, and is experienced in the questions, of the Jewish nation. He can enter with intelligence into matters which without such training would be meaningless. For the second time we have here from St Paul's own lips a narrative of his life and of his

change. In speaking in the 22nd chapter before a tumultuous audience at Jerusalem, he naturally and skilfully puts forward such points as would rather conciliate than outrage their prepossessions and prejudices. The narrative is the same in substance, yet differently presented. Such is the naturalness of Holy Scripture that it seems as though it were indifferent about a superficial consistency. So it is ever with truth: its harmony is often veiled and hidden; while falsehood sometimes betrays itself, to a practised ear, by a studied and ostentatious uniformity.

He begins, however, here as there, by a strong assertion of his original and of his persistent Jewish orthodoxy. *After the straitest sect of our religion I lived* in youth *a Pharisee. And now*, he proceeds, even now, it is for the national hope that he is here brought to trial. It is not he who has been a renegade. He is an Israelite still; tenacious of a hope and of a promise for which others are ignorantly, vainly, blindly looking, because they will not see that it is come. Such was he once: he thought once, like them, that duty called him to oppose Jesus of Nazareth. No persecutor of the Christians so keen once as he. *Many of the saints did I shut up in prisons. When they were being put to death, I gave my vote against them. I punished them oft in every synagogue. I sought to compel them to blaspheme.* Nay, unsatisfied with home efforts, *I persecuted them even unto strange* (*foreign*) *cities.*

Such was his course—known and notorious—till the very moment of his great change. He was at that moment on a persecuting journey. Charged with a public mission from the chief priests of Israel, he was at that time on his journey to the far Damascus, to bring the Christians there *bound unto Jerusalem.* What changed him? Was any sudden impulse of tenderness, any weak vacillation, any lurking hesitation about truth or duty, likely to upset resolutions so fixed, or to convert him to a new opinion offering nothing (to him) but reproach, disgrace, and ruin? The supposition is monstrous. Never was a man so pledged, so committed, to a particular course: and

never was a revolution so complete as that which changed him to the opposite.

How was it then wrought? By no deception of the senses, such as dream or nightly vision might bring with it: the hour was noon, and the place was the neighbourhood of a city. A light, distinguishable from the midday glare of an Eastern sun, was visible both to him and his companions. All were stricken to the earth by the blaze of that glory. And then he alone—all heard a sound, but to him alone by himself did the voice intelligibly address itself—*he heard a voice speaking to him*—speaking in a known language, even the sacred Hebrew tongue—and saying, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad. Who art Thou, Lord?* was his terrified answer: and the voice spake again, and said, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*

We cannot hurry—even if it be for the third time—through the deeply instructive narrative of a Conversion to which the world itself owes (under God) its Christianity. And therefore I pause for this night upon the few words read to you as the text, and contained (as we have now heard) in the first call of Jesus Christ from heaven to a blasphemer and a persecutor below, *It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.* When we look into them, we shall find much that is suitable to ourselves, and appropriate, I think, to the first Sunday evening of a new and as yet undeveloped year.

The first glance at the words shows us a proverb. Even from heaven, God, if He speaks at all, must adapt His speech to man's usages. The risen and ascended Saviour spake, not on earth only—He speaks also from heaven—in proverbs, in parables, in dark sayings. His *thoughts are not as our thoughts:* but His words, if they are to carry instruction in them, must be even as our words.

And the proverb before us is taken from common, from the very commonest life of man. Like so many of our Lord's similitudes in the Gospels, it is derived from agricultural life; from the experience of a husbandman ploughing or driving cattle.

With a goad in his hand, headed by a long sharp spike of iron, he drives before him the reluctant animal which would loiter or deviate from its way. In the obstinacy of an untamed will, the *bullock unaccustomed to the yoke* will even kick against his driver; and then the iron, otherwise harmless, enters, and enters deeply, into the recalcitrant foot. Which of the two is injured by it? Where is the folly, the harm, the pain? Not in the driver, but in the driven: the animal suffers for his rebellion against the will which, unresisted, meant only good.

Even thus it is in that region which the parable symbolized. In human life, in the affairs of the soul, in the things of moral and spiritual good and evil, there is a hand which directs, and there is also a will which it seeks to guide. The directing hand is God's, and the directed will is man's. So long as the human will moves along the straight furrow of duty, obeying the revealed Word and yielding to the Holy Spirit of its Maker, so long the goad of punishment is unfelt, because there is a unity between the Divine purpose and the human conduct. But if man will refuse the Divine influence, and stop *or hedge aside from the direct forthright* of obedience, the guiding impulse must become a painful goad of discipline, and resistance must be coerced and (if necessary) punished into acquiescence.

It is hard for thee, a creature and a subject, *to kick against the goad* of Divine discipline: hard for thee, infatuated, and suicidal; inasmuch as the hand over thee is stronger than thou, and, if not in love and tenderness as He would, then *with fury poured out* as He would not, must God *rule over thee.*

Such is the maxim by which our Lord once arrested from heaven the mad career of a persecutor, and turned him, under the influence of grace, into a servant and an Apostle. May its application be so blessed this night, as to correct some rebellious will, and bring back some resisting spirit into that docility and that obedience which is evermore happiness, rest, and peace.

1. *The way of transgressors is hard.* So speaks *Solomon, son of David, king of Jerusalem.* He had found it so. Bitterly no doubt had he contrasted the promise of his beginning with the

fulfilment of his end. And so speaks the Lord Jesus Christ in a proverb communicated from heaven. *It is hard for thee to kick against the goad* which drives.

The young man thinks it a sign of independence, thinks it a mark of freedom, to forget God that made him, and to walk in the way of his own heart. He learns to forsake the rule of his father, and to despise the law of his mother. He forms new associates: his habits become more and more such as a Christian parent would mourn over, such as a Christian home must cast out. Is he happy? Does he find his new life a freedom? Are his new ways ways of pleasantness, are his chosen paths peace? He tries to think them so: he calls them so in his hours of mirth: he doubts not that they will be so as he becomes more at home in them. But somehow—he cannot account for it—he feels himself in reality to be more in bondage than ever. The old rules of his home, the primitive principles of his parents, if they were restraints, at least had no sting in them: burdensome perhaps in their observance, certainly they never tormented him with after remorse. But now, these *pleasures of sin*, not only are they shortlived, they are anxious in the indulgence, and they are torturers in the retrospect. His conscience is never quiet in him: it is ever warning, ever reproving, ever lashing him. And when sickness comes, when grey hairs are upon him, when death is imminent; how then? Does he not become painfully conscious that he has broken the law of his being; that he has not shaken off the yoke of creation, but only driven sharply into his foot the goad of a rule which was too strong for him? Yes, it is the old tale once more repeated: sin becomes a cruel tyrant to the soul which yields to it: conscience wields a scourge over the back that is turned upon it: and judgment, even in this life, asserts the supremacy of right, and prophesies the coming of a time when in God's heaven and earth shall dwell only righteousness.

Young men—young women—whose course is yet unshaped as for good or evil, be persuaded of this; that, for mercy or else for judgment, there is a God over you; if you will have it so, a

God of love; if you will not have it so, then at least a God of power. *It is hard for thee* now, as well as dangerous eventually, to *kick against the pricks.*

2. Yet more nearly do we approach the first application of the proverb, when we speak of those who are kicking against the goad of a fatherly discipline. If those who resist God's Law find it *an evil thing and bitter* to have done so, not less they who resist that individual guidance which through smooth paths or rough is directing them towards an end.

There are many in this congregation who do not understand and do not love the method by which God is training them for Himself. They are denied many things which they desire: they are subjected to many things which they dislike. The very gifts which they most value, be they what they may; gifts of fortune, or of person, or of affection, or of success; are either never in their view, or are snatched away just as they would grasp them. Do not say that this is no trial. A large part of human suffering is made up of cruel disappointment. When they seemed to have even attained, the prize was wrenched from them. When they even did attain, the coveted fruit has turned to ashes in the mouth. By these means the world was made a world of nothingness to them. Perhaps they were too eager for it. They were of that nature which would have been satisfied to *sit by the fleshpots and eat bread to the full.* And therefore the discipline needful for them was an Exodus. Desert life, a wilderness alone with God, Sinai with God speaking from it, was necessary to their soul's safety. And yet scarcely were they in it, when they began to find fault. There was no bread: their *soul loathed this light bread*, the bread of eternity and of the spirit. There was no water: the smitten rock yielded only a spiritual supply; and they were athirst for something sweeter, more luscious, more earthly. Thus again and again they were rebellious against the hand that guided, and forced it to become a hand that drove. God would not let them alone. He would guide, or He would coerce. Why? *Even because He had a favour unto them.* To kick against that hand, even if it was forced by their wayward-

ness to hold a goad, was rebellion as much against happiness as against strength.

I address some tonight who are in definite trouble. They are under a providence which they cannot understand: they have lost a friend who was all to them: they dwell in a clouded home: *the light is darkened in the* very *heavens thereof.* Yet, my friend, *it is the Lord. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? or thy work, He hath no hands? Humble yourselves* rather *under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. It is hard for thee,* painful now, eventually ruinous, *to kick against the goad.*

3. There is yet a further use of the Divine proverb before us; and it is that in which it was originally spoken to St Paul himself.

St Paul was not a transgressor, in the sense of a lover of sin or a violator of conscience. He was entirely moral, thoroughly conscientious, living after the strictest sect of his religion, yea, *compassing sea and land to make one proselyte.* How could he be said to be kicking against the goad? For this one reason: that he was refusing the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He saw not his own sinfulness. He knew not his own want of a Saviour. He was not willing that others should trust in One whom he knew not. It was for this sin that he was accused of persecuting Jesus; arrested on his way to Damascus; stricken to the earth in deep penitence; and at last led forward into life by a way that he knew not.

Can there be any here present, whose sin is the sin of Saul of Tarsus? Certainly there are those in this age—and many of them—who are willing to take everything of the Gospel save the very Gospel itself; moral men, conscientious men, earnest men, self-denying and laborious men; men who love goodness of life, and cherish purity of heart, and admire God's holiness, and even recognize with all honour the character and the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ; yet who suffer themselves to repudiate altogether the revelation of the forgiveness of sin

through the atonement made for us by a Saviour, and of the renewal of the heart within by the personal operation of a Holy and Divine Spirit. These things *are foolishness to them.* And the very same man who is all gentleness and all charity in every other aspect will sometimes become all suspicion and all bitterness towards those who preach and receive these Gospel revelations as the very life of the life. The morality of the Gospel, and the devotion of the Gospel, and the charity of the Gospel, these he will receive; because reason itself and conscience, if they could not originate, can at least echo and confirm them: but that which lies under these, that which, if Scripture and experience can be trusted, furnishes the security for morality, and the impulse to devotion, and the motive for charity—even the sense of obligation to a crucified and living Saviour, the love of a Person *who was dead and whom Paul affirms to be alive*, the reconciliation of the heart and will to God by the acceptance of the proclamation of a free forgiveness —this he cannot comprehend, cannot see the need of, and will not receive. That Paul did wrong in persecuting, we can understand: but that Paul should have needed conversion when he was already conscientious, or could honestly call himself *the chief of sinners* merely because at that time he knew not of a Saviour, this, if we speak plainly, is an offence to us; exaggerated language, or else mystical and unreal.

My friends, depend upon it, even you, while you are thus, are, like St Paul, kicking against a goad. You do want a Saviour; want Him for complete forgiveness, want Him for entire cleansing of the conscience, want Him for strength and comfort and grace in daily life. And He is, and has His eye upon you and His hand over you, and is guiding your destinies, and (if you be such as I have imagined you) is preparing you, I would fain hope, for a glorious illumination, if you only submit yourselves to it and refuse it not. Why then will you keep out of your heart that bright light? Why will you compel Him to drive, who would lead and guide? Why must the foot pierce itself upon the compelling and coercing goad, when to you the words might be fulfilled even now in

all their tenderness and in all their sweetness, *Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me?* Bow yourself to that discipline of the heavenly wisdom, which, if at first it be mortifying to human pride and humbling to natural intellect, soon brings after it a sense of harmony to the soul and tranquillity to the life, attesting its origin from above by its suitableness to the wants of man. Prefer not a life of doubt and of loneliness, when *the Sun of righteousness* is ready to *arise* upon you *with healing in His wings*, and to fulfil in you the words of His own most blessed promise, *I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

Holy Scripture gives us examples of every kind of direction, from that of the driving goad to that of the guiding eye.

Mark the order. (1) There is the sharp iron for the refractory. *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* (2) There is the *bit and bridle* for the unreasoning. *Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouths must be held in with bit and bridle.* (3) There is the voice of the shepherd, known and loved by the docile flock. *When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.* (4) There is the guidance, not even of voice, but of the eye only, which suits the ready, anticipating will of the entirely tractable and sympathizing child. *I will guide thee with mine eye.* To kick against the goad is the extreme of disobedience; to watch the guiding eye, to wait not for the word or the sign, much less for the spur of authority, is the perfection of obedience.

In all senses, may that last be ours. Let us watch the Saviour's eye; let us be beforehand with the word which commands, much more with the bridle which enforces, or with the goad which compels. Let ours be the sympathy of affection; the gratitude which loves much, because it has been much forgiven. So shall the journey of life be for us tracked by mercy, and its end rest with Him *whom, not having seen, we have loved* with a love stronger than temptation, stronger than sin, stronger than death.

LECTURE XVII.

THE WORK OF MAN AND THE GIFT OF GOD.

Acts xxvi. 17, 18.

I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Much preaching and much hearing is utterly wasted, for lack of a clear purpose and a definite aim. We do not set before ourselves a goal which must be reached, or a prize which must be won. We speak for the chance of doing some good: we listen for the chance of getting some good: but what that good is, or how that chance can be calculated; by what appointed means we may attain what proposed and destined end; are questions which too little exercise the thoughts either of the minister or of his hearers.

Let the words spoken eighteen centuries ago by Jesus from heaven—words which made Paul an Apostle, and which are still preserved for our own guidance in the Scriptures of truth—be profitable, under God, this night, for making our vagueness definite and our vacillation resolute.

You have heard that remarkable proverb, spoken from heaven in a language of earth—spoken by Jesus to His persecutor; by the risen Saviour to the ignorant but zealous Pharisee, Saul

of Tarsus, now entering Damascus on a mission of sword and fire—*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* Hard for thee, a creature, to fight against the Creator; hard for thee, a sinner, to persecute the Saviour; hard for thee, a man with a conscience, to stifle the voice and to quench the light within; hard for thee, a dying man on his way to judgment, to *treasure up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

The work of years is undone in a moment, and the bold self-righteous persecutor is become as a child in the grasp of a giant. *Who art Thou, Lord?* It was a Person who spoke; and if a Person speaks from heaven, then must it be important to know who He is and why He speaks. *Who art Thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*

It was needless for St Paul, speaking before his present audience, to distinguish accurately between that which was spoken outside the city on the instant, and that which was communicated afterwards whether by the message of Ananias or personally to himself. In the narrative of the 9th chapter, the words are, *Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* Here, in a more condensed account of the transaction as a whole, the commission is given at once, and the disclosures of three days are (as it were) crowded into one.

But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I appeared unto thee for this purpose, to prepare (or *appoint*) *thee* as *a minister* (*servant*), *and a witness both of the things wherein thou didst* now *see me* (both of the circumstances of thy present sight of me) *and of the things wherein* (*as to*, or *for the communication of*) *which I will appear unto thee.* An Apostle must be a witness. He is not sent to say what he thinks, or what he has discovered by reflection and reasoning, concerning Divine truth and human duty: he is sent to give evidence; to say, *Thus and thus have I seen; I speak that I do know; I have seen Jesus Christ, He has spoken to me, and I speak from Him.* St Paul was to give evidence, wherever he went, a living man to living men, of what

he had now seen, in this first revelation to him of the Saviour, and of what he should hereafter see of Christ in further and fuller communications with Him as time went on.

Delivering thee out of the hands of *the people* of Israel, *and of the Gentiles;* rescuing thee, by my protecting presence, from the perils which shall beset thy ministry whether among Jews or Gentiles; *unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and* from *the authority (rule) of Satan unto God, that they may receive dismissal of sins and inheritance among those who have been consecrated by faith in me.*

We have here three things.

1. And first, the direct work of the Christian ministry. *I send thee to open their eyes.* The work is described, and the power is in the sending. Christ is all. He mocks not, by sending sinful man to sinful men, weak and unaided and alone. If He sends, He will also give the power. Therefore we may look at the work, and not be perpetually repeating that it is a work above man. *I send thee, to open their eyes.*

So then, before Him who looks on it from heaven, humanity lies as it were sleeping. The eye is closed: the eye of the understanding, the eye of the heart, the eye of the soul. Very remarkable is the contrast between this state and the tempter's promise. *God doth know,* he said as he first tempted, *that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods.* He prevailed: man did eat: and it came true. *The eyes of them both were opened.* But to what? *They knew that they were naked.* That opening of the eyes was to a consciousness of shame. To everything else, to everything save wretchedness, it was not an opening but a closing. As Christ looks on from heaven, He sees man not open-eyed, but blind. He sends Paul *to open their eyes.* That was his office. That, if we be at all Christ's ministers, is our office too.

It was the first thing done for Paul himself in his Conversion. *Ananias came, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. Look up,* the word is: *see again. And the same hour I looked up upon him.* What Saul needed, what Saul received,

that (scarcely in figure) man needs now: to be bidden, in Christ's name, to *look up;* to *see again;* to have his eyes opened.

The same eye may be opened to some things and closed to others. The very clearness of its vision for some things—say, for near objects—may be a mark of its dulness as to others, as to the more distant. A man may be quick to discern his own rights, his own interests, his own comforts and pleasures, in the life that is; and yet utterly mistaken, or absolutely indifferent, as to his highest interest, as to his truest happiness, as to his plainest duty, as a being born for immortality. O how dull oftentimes is the man of business, the man of politics, the man of literature or of philosophy, when the thing presented to him is the work of Christ or the hope of heaven! He too needs to have his eyes opened.

And this is the office, we here read, of the Christian ministry. This is the object of preaching. This is the end proposed to the diligent pastor, as he visits the whole or the sick placed under his charge. *I send thee to open their eyes.*

And this, you see further, by a testimony; as Christ's witness. If he cannot say, as St Paul could say, *Listen to me, for I have seen Jesus Christ;* at least he should be able to say, *Listen to me, for I know Jesus Christ; I have heard His voice in my soul, I have talked with Him in my soul, and He by His Spirit has set me free from the law of sin and death.* Yes, it is here that we fail. We bring a hearsay message. We have read of this, we have been told of that: others have said that it was so, and that they have tried it, and that they were saved by it: but we have not felt it ourselves, we have not tried it and found it effectual ourselves, and therefore we have no evidence to bring of facts known, of things seen. Alas, it is too much with us as it was with those prophets of old who *prophesied out of their own hearts, followed their own spirit, and had seen nothing.*

But St Paul had seen Jesus Christ, and was sent by Him to the work; the work of opening eyes by giving evidence concerning Jesus Christ. Whoever listened to him received sight.

The light was offered, was presented to him, for acceptance or else for rejection.

My friends, in a sense, and in a true sense, all of us have at least seen the light. In a Christian land, within a Christian Church, it can no longer be said of us that, *if we are blind, we have no sin. Light*, the true light, *is come into the world*, and even upon us it has shined. But the Gospel tells of some who *loved darkness rather than light:* and it also tells us why; *because their deeds were evil;* because they would not let the light shine into their dark corners, and make the whole heart and the whole life (as the Scripture says again) to be *full of light.* Thus we pass to a second point.

2. The work is, opening the eyes by a communication of light; by a testimony concerning Christ. But that work itself has a further object; in which not the minister, but the hearer, must be the agent. It is expressed thus. *That they may turn from darkness to light, and from the authority* or *rule of Satan unto God.*

That they may turn. Turning, or conversion—for it is the same word—follows upon the opening of the eyes. The communication of light, by the faithful preaching of the Gospel, is the work of another: but this turning is (under God) a man's own work. A minister may enlighten, but he cannot convert. That is (under God) an act of the will, of the individual will, consequent upon conviction. *I see that this is true. I see that Christ died, that Christ lives. I see that sin is sinful, and that holiness is duty. I see that forgiveness is promised, and that the Holy Spirit is promised. I see that prayer is man's privilege, and that whosoever asks shall have. Now therefore, seeing the light, I must turn to it. The impediment is in me, and the power to remove it is offered. Therefore I awake and arise, and Christ shall give me light.* This is conversion. It is the man himself turning from darkness to light. By a strong effort, the whole ability for which is of God, but is given in the using, the man says, and acts upon it, *This which is false and deceptive and wicked shall be mine no more. This which is true and holy and*

good shall be mine (in the strength of Christ) henceforward. I will walk in this light which He has brought to me. I will accept this blessedness which He offers me: this twofold blessedness, of a forgiven past and a cleansed future. That is conversion. O how unlike the dreams of many; who have mistaken (at the very best) the *opening of the eyes* for the *turning to the light;* more often, a startled, feverish, fleeting feeling, for a deliberate self-surrender, self-dedication, self-sacrifice to a forgiving Saviour and a holy God. Conversion without change is a contradiction in terms.

But we must not exaggerate man's power, or forget the difficulty of that change to which the Gospel calls us. And therefore it is written further, *and from the authority of Satan unto God.* We bless God for the merciful sympathy which breathes in that word. Yes, Satan has great authority. Let a man honestly turn from darkness to light, and then, if never before, he will become conscious of the strong gripe of evil. Habits of life, habits of mind, habits of feeling, are not changed in a day. The conviction may be strong, that thus it should be: but, alas, the first day of a Christian life reveals to a man his fallen state, as years of careless living have never revealed it. *When he would do good, evil is present with him.* Hitherto he thought himself free. He thought that he lived thus and not thus because so it pleased him. Now he sees that that fancied freedom itself was a bondage, and that a gilded chain may be a chain of iron still.

Let him turn then, not only from the darkness to the light, but also from the authority of Satan unto God. There is a stronger, just One stronger, than *the strong man armed:* to Him let him come, with Him let him abide, and he shall be made and he shall be kept free. *O Thou who didst cause the light to shine out of darkness, shine first in our hearts; and then cause Thou us to turn to the light from all darkness, and to Thee Thyself, who art both Light and Strength, from the bondage of that hard taskmaster who has too long kept us under his cruel yoke. Lift Thou up upon us the light of Thy countenance, and deliver us*

from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

3. *That they may turn:* and then, *that they may receive.* But the two things are not so much consecutive as coordinate. The one expresses man's part; the turning of the will and of the life to light and God. The other expresses God's part in the work of salvation; *that they may receive,* as soon as they turn, in the very act of that turning, two things; *forgiveness of sins,* and *inheritance among the sanctified.*

(1) *Forgiveness, remission, dismissal, of sins.* I know how lightly sin can sit upon the conscience of a transgressor. He has only to keep out of the light, to stand aloof from God, to close his eyes alike to the Word and to the Hand which he is resisting; and a sinner may travel smoothly enough along a considerable stage of life's journey. But let the light penetrate; let sickness come, let pain, let sorrow: nay, even these things may not do it; but let conviction come, let one of the thousand arrows which are abroad in God's spiritual kingdom pierce him sharply between the joints of his harness: and then see whether it is an easy thing to bear, or an easy thing to escape, that sense of sin; that living burning presence of accusing thoughts; that flaming searing catalogue of evil things done and good left undone. If it be true, as men say, that nature has no forgiveness of sins; that the body of man and the life of man must still and for ever be *found out* by iniquities long past, long repented of, or long forgotten; how much more does this magnify the unspeakable gift of God in His Gospel, in which the gracious proclamation stands first and midst and last also, *Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this Man,* Jesus Christ, *is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* He who heartily turns receives at once forgiveness, yea (for it is the very meaning of forgiveness) dismissal, of sins. That which he has done wrong shall not be remembered against him. *His iniquity is forgiven, his sin is covered.* God has *hidden His face* (as it were) *from his sins, and blotted out all his iniquities.*

Friends and brethren, is it not worth your while to accept

such a Gospel? Where, save in Christ, will you find a dismissal of sins? Who else, save Christ alone, even professes to have *borne your griefs and carried your sorrows?* to have *made reconciliation for iniquity*, and purchased for sinners a perfect righteousness?

(2) This in the present: this, in the time that is. And even the second thing spoken of is not all future. *An inheritance among the sanctified.* Dismissal of the past: and now an inheritance. Properly, *a lot;* and so an allotment; a portion falling to one by lot. It may remind us of those chapters of the Book of Joshua, in which we read of the assignment by lot to the tribes of Israel of their inheritance in the land of Canaan. And so we read in the Book of Psalms, by an employment of the same figure, *The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground: yea, I have a goodly heritage. A portion* then *among the sanctified.* It is almost the very expression of the 20th chapter: *Able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. Giving thanks unto the Father*, St Paul says to the Colossians, *who hath made us meet to be partakers*—more exactly, *qualified us for our share—of the inheritance of the saints in light.* The inheritance itself waits to be bestowed: but there is an earnest and a foretaste of it now. *Ye were sealed*, St Paul says to the Ephesians, *with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession;* until the actual redemption, by resurrection, of the bodies (as already of the souls) of His people.

A lot, or *portion*, then, *among the sanctified.* A secure place among the saints. And meanwhile, at once, an earnest of that blessedness; even the possession of that Holy Spirit in this life, of whom it is written, once again, in the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, *If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.* May we not say then, briefly, that the twofold gift here spoken of as the reward of turning to God, is (1) the gift of a free forgiveness, and (2) the gift of the sealing Spirit?

The kingdom of God itself *is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

And who then are *the sanctified?* *The sanctified* are, in other words, *the consecrated;* those whom God has taken to be His own; to be His wholly; free from the contaminations of sin, and from the profanenesses of the world. My friends, the thing spoken of is not an attainment of man, but it is a gift of God. The word denotes not those who have made themselves holy, but those whom God has set apart for Himself by anointing them, as His kings and priests, with the Holy Ghost. This is that of which St John writes, in the 1st chapter of the Revelation, *Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.* We all have received the sign and pledge of His consecration in Baptism: which of us has the reality of it? Which of us is so living as if he belonged to God only? refusing the suggestions of the devil, mastering the solicitations of the flesh, rejecting alike the flatteries and the mandates of the world, because he feels himself to be another's; because he desires to live, only and wholly, to Him who died for him and rose again? That man—is he not here tonight?—has upon him not only the name but the reality of God's consecration: the anointing oil is fresh upon his brow, the unction of the Holy One is full upon his heart.

And there is yet one thought, and one word, more. *By faith,* our Lord says, *that is in me. By faith in me.* Wonderful words! We may read them with *sanctified; sanctified by faith in me:* or we may read them with *receive; receive forgiveness and inheritance by faith in me.* He who speaks from heaven, still, even as when He spake on earth, makes faith everything. *From faith to faith. Therein* (in the Gospel) *is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.* Is it not so? Is it not *according to our faith* that we grow in grace? Is it not according to the vitality or else the deadness of our spiritual sight of Christ—for that is faith—that we either conquer sin, practise love, rise above earth, live for eternity; or

else, the opposite of these things, are tied and bound with the chain of sense, and grovel hopelessly among the things that are but for a moment? Yes, if we could but live in the sight of the Invisible One, we should also live our consecration. *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

The words now dwelt upon might have filled many Sermons. A poor superficial survey of them is all that I have attempted. But they have in them the very kernel and substance of the Gospel. The Fall and the Redemption; man as he is by nature, and man as he is by grace; the work of the minister, the work of the hearer, and the work of God; the end proposed, a heavenly inheritance, and the means of attaining it, faith in a Saviour; all this, and more than this, lies here, hidden or else unveiled, before us: *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*

LECTURE XVIII.

FESTUS AND AGRIPPA.

ACTS XXVI. 24—29.

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

For the king knoweth of these things; before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

WE have here before us three characters strongly marked, and characteristically expressing themselves. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Sermons have been preached on that long text which I have just read to you, making these their three heads of description and application, The careless scoffer—The almost Christian—The man of God.

And there are indeed in all times these three classes of men living upon earth, and probably present in the congregation. And they ought to be defined, addressed, dealt with, for their

own edification, or for that of others. That discernment of spirits which is no longer a gift for exposure is still a gift for introspection: and it is one office of the ministry so to depict, from Scripture and from experience, the shapes and forms of human character, that, without presuming to say to the individual, *Thou, or thou, art the man, the secrets of the heart* may yet be *made manifest* within it, and the hearer *falling down on his face* may *worship God*, and confess that He is still, as of old, present in His Word and in His Church.

A closer examination will modify the ordinary view of one at least of these three characters. God grant that, if it be so, the lesson to be derived from it may only be changed, not lost.

St Paul has been explaining himself before Festus and Agrippa, in preparation for being transferred to the hearing of the Emperor. Festus wishes to have something to say about him in the despatch which he must send with him to Rome. He knows that Agrippa is intimately acquainted with Jewish superstitions; himself, by profession, a believer in the Jewish Scriptures. He hopes for assistance from him in understanding the case. And Agrippa, with something perhaps of that well-bred complaisance which leads people on a visit to affect an interest in that which interests their host, and something (it may be) also of a more genuine curiosity as to the story of an eccentric and extraordinary man, lends himself to the wish of Festus, and, with much of the pomp and circumstance of a regular trial, calls upon the Christian prisoner to answer for himself.

We must not enter again into the particulars of that defence. It contained first of all a strong assertion of Jewish orthodoxy. *It is I—it is not my accusers—who adhere to the faith of my fathers. For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. Once I interpreted that faith as they do. None so bitter once as I against the name and the discipleship of Jesus. I was a persecutor. I took long journeys to persecute. I was on a persecuting mission at the moment of my great change. How that change came to me, you shall hear. I was not predisposed to it: every single habit of*

my life, every fixed and rooted principle of my mind, was against it. Yet I was convinced, I was converted, I was changed. And how? By the direct intervention and interposition of Him whom I was declaring to be a dead man. He stopped me, He spake to me, He commissioned and He sent me. Take into account the man and the life; take into account the circumstances preceding, attending, and following; remember what I was, and what I am; see me changed from a persecutor into an Apostle; behold me giving ease and fame, liberty and life, in the maintenance of a faith which once I set myself to destroy; and you cannot say there is nothing in it. Now you have what you wanted: somewhat to write about me to your lord. These are the causes of all this hostility. It is for believing what I know, and witnessing what I have seen, concerning Christ the hope of Israel, that the Jews seized and would kill me. But God has thus far helped me. I continue unto this day firm in the revelations of Moses and the Prophets concerning Him who by resurrection from the dead should become both a light to lighten the Gentiles, and also the glory of His people Israel.

It is at this point that the dialogue of the text interrupts the progress of the defence. It was prophesied of Christ in His earliest infancy that the effect of His coming would be *that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed.* It is by men's treatment of Christ, even more than by aught else, that they show decisively what manner of spirit they are of.

1. And first, then, Festus. What is the effect upon him of this argument?

He rudely interrupts the speaker, with raised voice and contemptuous sneer, saying (with even more of insolence than our English Version conveys), *Thou art mad, Paul: much learning doth make thee mad.* To the rough ignorant Roman the narrative just ended is a mere jargon of unmeaning sounds. Jesus and the Resurrection; a turning of mankind *from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God;* a heavenly vision changing a life, and a zeal for souls shown in perpetual journeyings, toils, and sufferings; all these things are to him the mere ravings of a fanatic, unworthy of the notice of a sensible man,

and only to be explained on the supposition of long secluded dreamings over philosophical books or mystical speculations. *Much learning doth make thee mad.*

What a charge to bring against a man whose labours were beyond those of any man: one who traversed sea and land, visited city and country, wrought with his own hands at a common trade, and turned every doctrine into an exhortation to practice. St Paul *maddened by much learning?* Festus might have found some more plausible, more possible, charge than that.

But so it is still. No charge is too foolish against a devout Christian. His life may be diligent, may be active beyond that of other men: he may go in and out day by day, with a blamelessness not to be gainsaid, and a laboriousness not to be overlooked: yet, just because he is a man of faith, because he believes in a world above, and endures as seeing One who is invisible, he must be an enthusiast, a visionary, a fanatic: if not *much learning*, then perhaps much praying, *doth make* him *mad.*

Strange to say, these Festuses are sometimes found in our congregations. They will kneel and pray to an invisible God through an unseen Saviour. They will utter the words which give thanks for Redemption and invoke the Divine Spirit. And yet tomorrow in their business, tonight in their houses, they will not so much as argue—they will even take it for granted—that nothing is real but that which is seen, that all is visionary which is not material. They have no more real apprehension of the necessity, or of the possibility, of holding converse with God, of receiving strength from Christ, of being renewed and inhabited by the Holy Spirit, than if these things were the dreams of enthusiasts or the ravings of madmen. And strange to say, the modern Festus, like his original, will affect to talk of these first principles of the Gospel, as though they were the inventions of *learning;* as though they were derived from the speculations of indolent students, and utterly unworthy of the notice of the vigorous sound-minded man of the world. Men calling themselves Christians, indignant if that title be denied them, will look you in the face and say, *Nothing is real but morality, and*

nothing is important but the conduct. And if you seek as far as possible to agree with them, and only beg to extend the term conduct into the inner life; to interpret it as including a heart right with God, affections set on things above, gratitude to Christ, and trust in the Spirit; still you find, to your sorrow, that they meant what they said literally: to have done no harm to any one (as they count harm), to have been just to all (as they define justice), alas, sometimes—it is no imaginary picture—to have paid their way and kept themselves respectable, this is the sum and substance of their religion: anything higher, anything deeper, they simply put aside and think scorn of: and if you ask them what will remain after death of these boasted payments of earthly dues; what the soul will carry away with it of this earthly respectability; how they will occupy eternity, or what indeed they can do in heaven; you find them prepared to risk all that: they will take their chance: God will not condemn the decent liver: perhaps even the indecent liver may not find himself quite shut out. Men who so talk are the Festuses of Christendom: and men who so judge, so presume, and so hazard, are (it must be feared) one ten times more numerous than they who avow and utter it.

We should ill copy St Paul's bright example, as it lies here before us, if we treated scornfully this state of feeling. How dignified, how majestic, because how calm and how courteous, his brief reply! *I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth words of truth and soberness.* Yes, *the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.* He who so wrote so did. He makes no compromise indeed with error. He does not hasten to explain away his convictions, or beg Festus to believe that he is one with him all the time in principle. Firmly, yet with all respect for office, does he repudiate the charge of madness, and declare that his words are words of truth, his faith as sober as it is profound.

The world of all time, of Christian times not least, delights to

arrogate to itself the two titles, *sensible*, and *practical*. On a spiritual life, on a heavenly mind, on an earnest zealous devotion, it sits in judgment half kindly, half scornfully. *It understands it all: it has taken the measure of all: it could be the same any day: but it is too sensible and too practical to think of it.* A calm, moderate, rational religion; in other words, a religion which can combine the conveniences of this life with the hopes of another; that is the aim—we could almost say, more and more the aim—of many of the most respectable and the most amiable of our countrymen. They take out of the Gospel all that makes it pungent, angular, or unamalgamable; and then they praise it for its adaptation to human life; compliment it upon its versatility; and quote perhaps, with a volubility almost profane, that verse of St Paul which says that *godliness hath the promise of the life that now is* as well as *of that which is to come*. It is not in that sense that St Paul wrote it: it is not in that sense that he here declares before Festus that the words of his Gospel are words of *truth and soberness*.

Rather does he say this: and may God write it upon all our hearts.

It is no madness to believe what God has spoken, to trust what God has revealed, or to expect what God has promised. To love Him with all my heart is no enthusiasm; to devote myself entirely to Christ is no fanaticism. Soberness is the spirit of a sound mind: that mind only is sound, which moves altogether where it moves at all, and carries out into daily action principles received as true. He is the madman, who *calls Christ Lord, and does not the things which He says;* who professes to be seeking a heavenly home, and never sets forth one foot towards it. *If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him.*

We fools, shall Festus say of Paul in the day of the great re-awakening, *We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour; how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints.*

2. Turn to the other chief auditor: to king Agrippa. From the rude and hopeless Festus St Paul appeals to the more

cultivated and enlightened assessor. *The king knoweth of these things.* He must have heard surely, living in Palestine, and in constant communication with its people, the great story of the life and ministry, the death and resurrection, of Jesus of Nazareth; if not (for to this also the words may refer) of the wonderful conversion and devoted labours of his late-found disciple and Apostle. *Before him I speak freely. I am persuaded that no one of these things is hidden from him. This thing*—whether the Saviour's work, or His servant's conversion—*this thing has not been done in a corner.* But was there not, in Agrippa's case, a preparation for these great events? Did he not read, in Scriptures which he accepts, predictions, neither few nor doubtful, that thus it must be? *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.*

It is difficult to imagine a more touching or persuasive appeal. We feel as though it must have told. And this feeling may have led to the adoption of that rendering of the king's answer which yet, we fear, a sounder criticism must modify or set aside. *Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* The words have been commonly read as grave and serious; the reply of a man moved by the Apostle's question, and balancing the claim of duty which it presented. *Almost thou persuadest me: shall I yield, or shall I procrastinate?* And an instructive commentary has been drawn from them, *Behold, now*—not tomorrow, but today—*behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation.*

The lesson is seasonable, whencesoever derived: but the scope of the king's answer is not this. That cold scoffing spirit was not thus suddenly solemnized: that profligate half-hearted time-server was not thus turned on the instant into a serious enquirer after truth. No, Agrippa says this rather—and in a tone either of playful banter, or of scornful sarcasm—*With but scant persuasion thou wouldest make me a Christian. A Christian—name abhorred alike of Jew and Gentile—name of reproach and obloquy wherever named—to become a Christian—to forfeit perhaps fortune and rank and royal title, and become the disciple of a*

despised Nazarene—the brother and the fellow of an outcast like thee—

That's somewhat sudden—

thy words must needs be persuasive if they counsel that. To part with all, as the result of a few moment's hearing; as the consequence of listening, in chance carelessness, in a casual visit, to a poor prisoner's self-defence; that surely thou canst scarcely ask for? Wait a while: give time and place, interval and opportunity, at least: propose not an act so momentous, on a summons so slight and short. Such sudden changes may do for thee; an inferior, a common Jew, an enthusiastic, impulsive, hasty man; converted by a sunbeam, by a voice, by a vision: they are not for me.

It is impossible to say, all proof being denied us, what may have been the innermost feeling of the mind which thus expressed itself. Some have supposed that the cold ironical answer was but the cloke of a spirit ill at ease; that the unexpected question of the Apostle had wrought a conviction within, which could neither safely be expressed nor altogether disavowed. It may have been so. But we who know anything of that case-hardening which is the punishment below of convictions long stifled, and more especially of fleshly lusts long cherished, must fear that the simpler aspect of the words is the truer, and that a conscience long skilled in parrying the home-thrusts of conscience, is here seen turning aside the very *sword of the Spirit* by that triple coat of mail which is the last vesture of the obdurate.

At all events, we do best to draw our lesson rather from what is seen than from what may be hidden. And therefore we say this of Agrippa's answer; that it is the plea of more enlightened, as the other was of more ignorant minds, for putting aside the Gospel call. Festus called spirituality madness: Agrippa calls decision rashness. The one says, *To talk of things unseen; of matters which thou canst neither touch nor taste nor see nor smell; is, at once, enthusiasm and folly.* The other says, *To bid me alter all in a moment; to bid me give up rooted opinions, life-long principles, and imperious habits, at the call of a despised man's history; to persuade me, by a few brief words, and*

in a few fleeting moments, to forsake all and follow thee; this is unreasonable, this is trifling, this is ridiculous. At least I must have time.

O, my friends, if there are Festuses among us, are there not Agrippas? Is not this the very answer, almost in words, of ten thousand times ten thousand? *It is too sudden—too abrupt—too startling? What will this friend think, and that enemy? What will become of this inveterate habit, and of that delightful darling lust? O no! A little while hence—when I have just paved the way—when I have had a little conversation with wife or husband, when I have got out of my path this temporary obstacle and that formidable foe—then—then—but not now.* How nearly is the lesson, when we study it attentively, that of the Gospel narrative. Jesus *said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead.* Yes, the Agrippa says the call is too sudden: he must do one or two little things first, and then—: but Jesus says, *If the word is true, if the call is from God, it admits of no delay: rather let the dying die without thy presence, and the dead go forth to his burial without thy following, than lose the opportunity—the one day, or the one hour, of thy visitation—by pleading that the world is urgent with thee, and that therefore God must wait.*

O, we know well, we know too well, the inconvenience of being hurried in the things of God. It is very inconvenient—it is intolerably burdensome—to be told to go at once, to go today, to go this moment, and serve Christ. *If it might only wait one day! Why dost Thou come, Lord, before the time? I would have opened to Thee tomorrow: but there Thou standest knocking, knocking, knocking—and wilt take no denial. In too brief a time, on too sudden a summons, Thou wouldest have me to be a Christian.*

What says His servant? What saith he who could only advise, who could not give, decision? *I would to God*—yes, the original says, *I would pray to God—that, whether in a short space or a long, not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, might*

become such as I am—except these bonds. The beautiful delicacy, and the touching courtesy, of this reply, has been the subject of admiring comment in all times. *Except these bonds. I would not have you like me in my privations, or like me in my sufferings: but I would have you like me in my faith, like me in my hope, and like me in my joy.*

Whether in a short space or a long. Agrippa says ironically, *In a short space,* with unreasonable suddenness, *thou wouldest make me into a Christian.* St Paul takes the word from him, and answers, *What I seek is the result. Be it soon or late: be it on the sudden, or on long reflection: be it by my brief words, or by any other process, longer or shorter, which God may see fit in His wisdom and in His mercy to employ: I would see thee a Christian at last. I would see thee walking in the light into which I have been admitted; enfranchised with that liberty wherewith Christ has set me free. I would have it so; and I will pray for it.*

King Agrippa, like Felix and Festus, like his ancestors in the sacred story, flits now from the scene. Nothing came, we believe, of this strange interview between light and darkness, between sin and the Gospel. Agrippa kept his useless idle faith in Jewish Scriptures, kept too his heart's lust, his obscene idol, his earth-bounded life. Times of trial drew on: in the last Jewish wars he sided with the Roman; and then retired to drag out an inglorious age through thirty uneventful years, with a titular royalty and in real servitude, under the imperial shadow at Rome. In the year of our Lord 100, being the third year of the Emperor Trajan, he died there; the last prince of the bloodstained race of Herod. Yet, like all whose names, for good or for evil, are once stamped upon the holy page, Agrippa remains to all time for the edification and instruction of the Church which he despised.

Shall it be said of any of us, that we, without the excuse of Festus, are scoffers at the spiritual life? or that we, without the excuse of Agrippa, are dalliers with the trumpet-call of a Christian decision? O, God forbid! I would summon you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so to improve (more especially)

that holy season on which we have this week entered, that it may be to you a time of serious self-examination, earnest heart-deep resolution, and true spiritual refreshing and revival. We need these mementos of judgment and eternity, every one of us: I have sometimes feared that we need them more than ever. Is there not amongst us an almost growing indifference, an almost growing intermixture and confusion between the Church and the world? if not a tardier step towards the sanctuary, at least a more wistful backward look towards the city of sin and of desolation? Judge ye, my friends, judge ye. And may the gracious parable be fulfilled yet again in every one of us, *While he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand...the Lord being merciful unto him...and said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*

LECTURE XIX.

THE SHIPWRECK.

ACTS XXVII. 25.

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

THRICE I suffered shipwreck: a night and a day I have been in the deep. Thus St Paul wrote to the Corinthians more than two years before the events related in this chapter of his life. Of those earlier shipwrecks we have no record. They occurred, doubtless, in some one of those many gaps in the history of the Acts, of which his long residences at Tarsus in the 9th chapter, at Antioch in the 11th, 12th, and 14th chapters, at Corinth in the 18th, and at Ephesus in the 19th, will furnish a few examples.

But tonight, in our progress towards the close of our long course, we are to study the detailed account of a fourth shipwreck; that which befell him on his way from Palestine to Italy, whither he was sent as a prisoner exercising his right of appeal, as a Roman citizen, to the personal hearing of the Emperor.

St Paul's long detention at Cæsarea is now ended. His hearing before Festus and Agrippa had resulted in a full recognition of his innocence. It should almost seem as if his appeal to the Emperor had been a mistake, so far as his personal prospects were concerned. Agrippa had said to Festus, at the close of the last chapter, *This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.* But *all things work together for good*

to them that love God: and it was thus that the way was opened for that important ministry at Rome, to which he had so long and so earnestly looked forward.

The time was come. One of those merchant vessels, on which in those days even generals and princes had to depend for transit from one part to another of the great Empire, was now in the harbour of Cæsarea, bound for Adramyttium on the coast of Mysia. It was expected, no doubt, as it happened, that an opportunity would be found of exchanging this vessel, in some port of Asia, for one more directly bound for Italy. Paul, and some other prisoners with him—each with his own burden of care and fear, he *an ambassador in bonds* for Christ—were placed under the charge of a centurion named Julius, and began the tedious navigation of the seas of Syria, Cilicia, and the further shores of Asia Minor.

One day brought them to Sidon. There, as elsewhere, was already a Christian community: and the courtesy of the centurion, interested (it should seem) thus early in his prisoner, allowed Paul the opportunity of visiting the place and the Church. What these glimpses of Christian friends were to him, we might guess from his character, and we know from his letters.

Contrary winds began thus early to retard the progress of his voyage. It was necessary to change the usual direction, sailing under the lee of Cyprus—that is, in this case, along the east and north (instead of the southern side) of the island—and coasting along the shores of Cilicia and Pamphylia until they reached the port of Myra in Lycia. There they lighted upon an Alexandrian cornship—driven perhaps by the same stress of weather out of its straighter course to Italy—and the prisoners, with their centurion and other passengers, were transferred into it to prosecute their voyage thither.

It was still and increasingly a tedious passage. The wind, west or north-west, compelled them, after leaving Cnidus, at the south-west corner of the coast of Asia, to take the unusual and less desirable side of the great island of Crete, passing under

Salmone its eastern headland, and then along its southern shore as far as an anchorage called (and still called) *Fair Havens*, in the neighbourhood of which, St Luke stays to notice, was a town named Lasea.

For the moment they were in safety. There had been great loss of time; and now that season had set in, which sailors knew to involve, in those seas, especial danger. *The fast was now already past:* the fast, that is, of the great day of Atonement or Expiation, occurring (like our Michaelmas) at the end of September, and used, like it, as a common date of time. To advance further, so late in the season, and in the face of obstinately adverse winds, was an act of imprudence against which St Paul ventured earnestly to remonstrate. He foresaw, he said, that their onward way would involve great risk, not only to the cargo and the vessel, but also to the numerous persons—soldiers, sailors, and passengers—on board. Two hundred and seventy-six souls (if that be the true reading of the 37th verse, which is doubtful) formed an aggregate of human life not lightly to be thrown away. The warning was unheeded. Not yet had the full value of that inspired counsellor been felt and owned among them. The master (or pilot) of the ship, and the owner of the cargo, were listened to before the prisoner. *The harbour was not commodious to winter in;* and there was a better, could they but reach it, within forty miles, sheltered from those particular winds which were at present most to be dreaded.

The decision to proceed was taken, and for the moment all seemed to favour it. Instead of the troublesome westerly and north-westerly winds from which they had suffered, there blew from the south a gentle breeze, which enabled them, after rounding the cape, four or five miles to the westward of *Fair Havens*, to start with every advantage, along a shore bending now to the northward, for the desired haven of Phœnix. Triumphant, no doubt, over the cowardly prudence of the Apostle, they advanced a few miles, in good hope and high spirits, along the sheltering shore of Crete.

But a sudden change came. A tempestuous wind, called

Euraquilo, blowing from the north-east, came down upon the ship from the high lands of the island. There was nothing now to be done, but to submit. *The ship was caught, and we let her drive.* It was not without difficulty that they even could take up the boat which was in tow astern, and which might become so necessary for the safety of the crew. They then passed cordage tightly round the timbers of the ship, to prevent the risk of their starting asunder under the violence of the sea. Other precautions were taken (described in the Authorized Version as *striking sail*, in the Revised Version as *lowering the gear*) to avoid their being carried, as the direction of the wind threatened, upon the famous quicksand, or Syrtis, of Africa. All must be done to keep well to the westward. The next day they lightened the ship of a portion of its cargo; the day following, of all its spare tackling.

And now it is impossible to imagine a more dreary or dispiriting scene than that which the sacred writer, St Luke, himself an eye-witness of all, so graphically presents. *No one*, writes a recent author already repeatedly referred to, *who has never been in a leaking ship in a long-continued gale, can know what is suffered under such circumstances. The strain both of mind and body—the incessant demand for the labour of all the crew—the terror of the passengers—the hopeless working at the pumps—the labouring of the ship's frame and cordage—the driving of the storm—the benumbing effect of the cold and wet—make up a scene of no ordinary confusion, anxiety, and fatigue. But in the present case these evils were much aggravated by the continued overclouding of the sky, which prevented the navigators from taking the necessary observations of the heavenly bodies. When neither sun nor stars*, St Luke says, *shone upon us for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, thenceforth all hope that we should be saved was taken away.*

To the gloom and despair everywhere prevailing was added the exhaustion of long abstinence. Ceaseless toil and utter despondency had precluded the thought of food. There was among them but one person now capable of command. It was

the Christian prisoner: unheeded till danger pressed; but now the one leading and sustaining and animating spirit. He reminds them, yet without reproaches, of their disregard of his warning. The remembrance might make them listen now: too late to avoid, but not too late to mitigate, the evil. And then he gives the solemn assurance, in the name of his God, that there shall be no loss of life. *There stood by me this night the Angel of that God whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must stand before Cæsar: and lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*

For the time there was no relief, no respite. The fourteenth night of that tossing upon the Adriatic was now come, when some sounds, indicative of approaching land, struck upon the practised ear of the sailors. The first notice was soon confirmed. The sounding line, which reported first a depth of twenty fathoms, soon changed to fifteen fathoms: and now an imminent danger arose of being wrecked upon the outlying rocks of some unknown shore. Nothing could be done, save to throw a number of anchors from the stern of the vessel, and then idly to *wish for the day.* O how many a weary watcher, through a long night of sickness of body or anguish of soul, has had to do that, and could do nothing more: just to *wish for the day.*

Before dawn, a new peril had shown itself. The selfish sailors, thinking only of their own lives, had formed the project of escaping in the boat, and leaving the soldiers and passengers to their fate. They pretended to be letting down the boat for another purpose; to carry out in it some anchors to steady the prow or foreship, as had already been done for the stern. It was again the Christian Apostle, whose ready discernment and calm promptitude averted the danger. *Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Except these,* the sailors, *abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.* As if he had said, *There is work present, and work before us, which will need a mariner's skill as well as a soldier's courage.* The hint was enough. The

soldiers used their swords, and the ropes of the boat were cut before the sailors could enter it. One boat could have availed little in present emergencies: and the help of the sailors was indispensable.

Yet once more, before the last crisis of the shipwreck, is St Paul's voice heard: and it is in the same calm and constant tone which has made him the commander, not in name but in right, of all who sail with him. He foresees that the last struggle of all will be trying and formidable, and that exhausted frames can ill meet it. Instead therefore of exciting still further, by spiritual demands, minds already strung and taxed to the uttermost, he uses an argument altogether calming and fortifying, and prays them to take some food, necessary to health and even to safety; in the assurance that, however imminent the peril, life is secure. Secure, on God's word, and by special grant to God's servant. By precept first, and then by example, he summons them to this humble duty. *When he had said this, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: and he broke it, and began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and themselves also took some food.*

After this, in the prospect of a speedy end, for good or evil, of their present suffering, they threw overboard the remaining (and probably damaged) wheat, that the vessel might be lightened for its last grounding. Morning dawned upon an unknown shore. But it was their one chance: and presently they could discern, through the early twilight, an opening in the cliffs, disclosing a sandy or pebbly beach upon which it might be possible to run the vessel aground. They took up the anchors, loosed the rudders from their fastenings, hoisted the main or (more probably) the fore sail to the wind, and made toward the shore. The spot on which they lighted proved to be a promontory, or in reality (it is supposed) an island scarcely separated from the coast, and forming a spot, St Luke says, *where two seas met;* upon which the vessel was so driven, that, while *the forepart stuck fast, and remained immovable, the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.*

At this last moment a formidable danger threatened the life of St Paul. It was the cruel counsel of the soldiers, hardened by long use to an utter unconcern for human life, to kill the prisoners; lest, in the confusion of this general struggle for self-preservation, any of them should escape from custody by swimming. And the suggestion was only frustrated by the care of the centurion Julius for that one Christian prisoner who from the first appears to have awakened his interest, and who by his conduct during these trying scenes must have gained a firm hold upon his confidence and esteem. As it was, a more humane order prevailed. *The centurion commanded that they who could swim should cast themselves overboard first, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and others on some of the things from the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

The details of the sacred narrative, and the curious and interesting questions which spring from it, are for another time and place. But it was impossible without this brief survey of it to bring into view that one thing with which we are all deeply concerned; the example here afforded of the exercise and the influence of a Christian mind in circumstances of trial, agitation, and pressing danger.

We have seen St Paul in many positions. We have noticed, at various times, in the course of these Lectures, his activity, his boldness, his wisdom, his faith, his charity, his devotion, his skill, his patience. But the point before us tonight is different from all these: might I not say as truly, is a combination of them all? his conduct and character as tested and probed by a long-continued season of imminent peril.

Danger is always a test of character. One man is daunted by danger. Another man is bewildered by danger. Another man is irritated by danger. Many a man is rendered selfish by danger. Read the history of a sudden alarm of fire in a crowded building: the impulse of self-preservation is so strong as to defeat itself; and a heap of crushed or burnt corpses will attest both the predominance and the infatuation of a

spirit of selfishness in the heart of man in a time of great and sudden jeopardy.

And this even in Gospel days. The diffusion of Gospel light does not of itself destroy this selfish principle in man. There are indeed three influences of unequal strength, but each powerful, which may under given circumstances counteract it.

(1) A sense of honour. The captain of a burning or sinking ship will count it his duty to be the last to quit her. He will maintain his place to the end, and perish (if need be) himself alone. A regiment of soldiers will keep guard on deck, over order and life; and count death itself but the just forfeit of a profession which is the soul of honour.

(2) And humanity alone has sufficed to make martyrs. A man worthy of the name will fling himself into deep water, in cold winter, to rescue a drowning woman.

(3) How much more will love—personal love—the love of husband or wife, of sister or child—counteract the force of selfishness, and make timidity for the moment brave. These things are the instincts of original or of second nature. I scarcely know that we can connect them closely—certainly not inseparably—with the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour.

But how different are these things, at their highest point, from the sustained calmness and commanding wisdom of him whose long trial is here drawn out before us. None but a Christian—nothing but the Gospel—nothing but the living grace of a living Saviour—could have thus done and thus spoken.

Notice (1) the tranquillity. This man belongs to God. *God*, he says, *whose I am, and whom I serve.* Nothing can come amiss to him. He is the property of One, to whom to belong is to be immortal. To live on, is to see *the fruit of his labour.* To die, is *to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.*

Notice (2) the elevation. This man is in communication with God. *This night the Angel of God stood by me.* A man like this is just the converse of Jonah. To have him in the ship is a safeguard. See how a child in a thunderstorm will

feel himself safe with a pious parent. Nay, more than children have known the comfort of having a righteous man under their roof in days of popular excitement or raging pestilence. A visit from God's Angel—the abiding presence of the Lord of Angels—is enough to make a mean man a giant, a weak woman a tower of strength.

Notice (3) the faith. This man *believes God, that it shall be even as it was told* him. In his case, indeed, that which was told him was a special prediction of safety. *Thou must stand before Cæsar.* Thou art on thy way to the Emperor's tribunal; and *as thou hast maintained my cause in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* This necessity, pleasant or painful, is thy safe conduct. *Immortal till thy work be done,* thy work is not done. *And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.* Yes, the one faithful shall thus far guarantee the faithless. Where he is who is on God's business, there are they safe, in body at least, who are on their own.

In these days we know not these things. The child of God is early *taken away from the evil to come:* the wicked *rage* on, *and are confident.* Yet is the same spirit of faith, even where the same form of faith is not. He who, *whether he live, lives to the Lord,* or, *whether he die, dies to the Lord,* may well be trustful amidst surrounding dangers, and even against hope believing.

Notice (4) the judgment. This man, the despised Christian, is at once pilot, and shipmaster, and centurion. He is the one to foresee danger. He counsels prudence. He advises delay where safety is; and he shows how a danger which might have been averted can yet be mitigated. It is he who finds out the secret treachery of the sailors; it is he who recruits failing strength, by timely food, for tomorrow's labours. Yes, there are times when men who have scoffed at the Christian as a visionary, come to recognize his value. It is something in this selfish world, to be convinced of a man's disinterestedness. It is something, in this fickle and unprincipled world, to know that a man is honest, and that he has an aim. And at least

in that hour when the world is receding from our view, and we care for nothing which is not both of God and to God, then, if never before, in that time of failing spirit and fainting heart, we send for him, and we desire and we tolerate him, and him only, of whom we are assured that he will speak to us the words of God, and guide us, as in God's sight, into the one haven where we would be.

Notice yet again, (5) the authority. Who is this man? He is a prisoner: a prisoner of a despised race, the Jewish: a prisoner of an untolerated, an outlawed sect, the Christian. What is he, that he should speak with authority? Yet no sooner does danger threaten, than he is the man of authority. Pilot, owner, centurion, all are silent in the face of these warring elements. One alone speaks, who is at peace with the God of Nature, who has in him the God of grace. It is he who speaks now, and says, *Do this or that.* It is he who speaks then, and says, *Ye ought to have done this: now repair the error, and do that.* And strange to say, they listen. There is now no high priest to say to them that stand by, *Smite him on the mouth.* Euroclydon and Boreas have stopped that. He stands forth now, before sailors and soldiers, face to face with Nature and with Nature's God. The friend of God is the man listened to, when *God's arrows go abroad.* The day of God's judgment is the day also (even in this life) of *the manifestation* and the recognition *of the sons of God.*

Notice lastly (6) the love. This man, if he were a natural man only, would have been simply depressed, merely isolated, misanthropical, and self-contained. What matters it to him who eats or eats not? What matters it whose lives are given him, and whose left and lost? Yet he makes common cause in every thing with the heathen soldiers who guard, and with the heathen centurion who is to hand him over. He cares for their cheerfulness as well as for their safety. He prescribes for their health, and he counsels for their hopefulness. Surely *the love of Christ constrains* him. Surely he has drunk deeply of that spirit *which was also in Christ Jesus.*

My friends, it may not be given to us, or it may not be laid

upon us, to be *driven for fourteen nights up and down in Adria*, as prisoners, confessors, and martyrs, for the testimony of the truth. Yet none the less is it given us, or else laid upon us, to cultivate betimes that spirit which St Paul here manifested in extreme danger. No man knows how he may be tried, even now, even in these still days and in our common life. Now and then a contagious sickness comes, when selfishness clamours within, and all but the true Christian look out for themselves. Let a few cases of deadly fever, or of some new and foreign disease, occur (as they have occurred) in this town; and you will see who among rich or poor has anything of St Paul's spirit and anything of St Paul's charity. Where is then that Christian man, or that Christian woman, who is both brave with St Paul's boldness, wise with St Paul's prudence, and tender with St Paul's love? It is only he who communicates with God by night, who can carry about with him God's comfort and God's authority by day.

And there are dangers, Christian friends, more formidable, just because more subtle, than any that beset the body. There are temptations potent with souls; infections and contagions of evil more deadly than those of plague or pestilence. In these things also, he only is either wise to counsel or strong to command, who has tried in himself the arms which he would wield, and vanquished in himself the enemies against whom he would guard others. Be Christ's first yourself, and then shall you win others to Him. Like St Paul, first be God's, and then serve Him. *The sling and the stone* of an honest heart-deep sincerity shall be weapons more availing in the world-wide and the life-long battle, than the showier *helmet and sword and coat of mail* which have been girt upon you by another unproved. Be yours first *the girdle of truth:* then *the shield of faith:* and then *the sword of the Spirit.*

THE GOSPEL AT ROME.

Acts xxviii. 24.

And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

The persons thus spoken of were Jews, who had been listening at Rome to St Paul's argument from Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. The effect upon them was that which has been the effect of the like reasoning in all ages: *some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.*

St Paul's shipwreck had occurred on the coast of Melita, or Malta. There he had been received with kindness; and two incidents of the visit had changed that kindness into reverence.

The first of these was a personal escape. Out of a faggot, gathered for burning, there came a viper, which fastened on his hand. At first the inhabitants took this as a proof that Paul was some malefactor—*a murderer*, they said—whom, though rescued from the sea, *justice suffered not to live.* But when they saw that he was able to shake off the reptile without any harm happening to him, *they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.* So slight and inconclusive are human reasonings, when they endeavour to draw inferences from life's accidents. It is not always that *the tower in Siloam falls* upon the eighteen

guiltiest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem: nor is the prosperity of men always a proof of their virtue. The time of retribution, for good or for evil, is not yet. To interchange Providence and Judgment is one of the gravest mistakes that man can fall into.

The other incident was of a different kind. The father of *the chief man of the island*, in whose house Paul stayed for three days, was ill of a dangerous sickness: and it was granted to the Apostle, through prayer and the laying on of his hands, to be the instrument of his miraculous restoration. This led to other applications. *All others also who had diseases in the island came, and were healed.* Thus the Christian prisoner—for such he still was—became the object of general honour, and many marks of grateful veneration attended his departure.

Three months had thus passed, when another Alexandrian cornship, which had wintered in a port of the island, and was now about to complete its voyage to Italy, gave the opportunity of ending this tedious detention. By Syracuse, and Rhegium, they at length reached Puteoli in the Bay of Naples, and remained there for seven days in the society of Christian friends. From thence it was a land journey. Along a road, every step of which is familiar to the classical student, they went towards Rome. At two places on the road they were greeted by visitors from the capital; assuring them that, whatever danger or suffering might be in prospect, Christ *had much people in the* great *city;* and that there would at least be sympathy, if there was not protection.

Arrived in Rome, the centurion, Julius, delivered up his prisoner to Burrus, prefect of the prætorian guard. Here too the same interest which St Paul everywhere awakened was shown in every possible mitigation of his position. He was allowed to hire a lodging, apart from the camp, and to occupy it unmolested, save by the perpetual presence of a soldier to whom he was chained. Henceforth for two years was realized to the letter that title in which he learned to glory, *An ambassador in bonds;* or, more exactly, *an ambassador in a chain.* They

who sought him out now must *not be ashamed of his chain.* Whether he ate or slept, conversed or preached, wrote or prayed, a rude Roman soldier, the native perhaps of some remote semi-barbarous province, must be the companion of every act, the sharer of every confidence, the witness of every utterance whether in the ear of man or God.

Thus was he learning his highest lessons in the school of God. He was *enduring hardness*, not in the form of great enterprises, but rather in that of a compulsory inactivity, *as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

Yet even here he is the witness, not in word but by example, to that marvellous truth, that there is no condition of life, absolutely none, in which he who wishes to find work for God is debarred from doing so. Many a man who has preached half in vain from his pulpit has preached with authority and with acceptance from his sick-bed. Those who had scoffed at the call to hear him preach have been melted at the summons to see him suffer.

Three days only had passed since his arrival in the great city, when he finds means—true to his system and to his Master's orders—to speak his Gospel first of all to the Jew. By the help of St Luke, of Timotheus, of Demas, or some other of his companions not in bonds, and still more perhaps of some of the Christian residents in Rome, he found means to *call together the chief of the Jews*, and to protest to them both his innocence of any criminal or even unpatriotic conduct, and also his devout adherence to that *hope of Israel*, the great doctrine of a Messiah and a Resurrection, for which he always declared himself to be thus outcast and suffering. *For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.* The answer was more civil than ingenuous. His auditors declared that they had heard nothing against him by word or letter from their countrymen in Judea. They only desired to hear from his own lips what he had to say *concerning this* new *sect* which *is everywhere spoken against.* They spoke as persons open to conviction; waiting only to be convinced.

A day was fixed for a full discussion of this momentous question, the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. From every part of the Old Testament St Paul drew his arguments; *opening and alleging* no doubt (as at Thessalonica) *that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I proclaim unto you, is Christ. From morning till evening* the disputation lasted. Even enemies to the truth were then in earnest, and counted not the minutes, no, nor the hours, of a discourse on the things which professed to be for their peace.

The result is expressed in the words of our text. After which there remains only, before we reach the last sentence of the Book, that solemn *one word* with which St Paul at last unwillingly dismissed the gainsayers; even that passage from the vision of Isaiah, which is more often quoted in the New Testament than any other clause of ancient Scripture; the voice of Divine judgment upon the indolent and dishonest hearer, whose punishment shall be the inability to hear aright; the sealing upon him, finally and for ever, of that deafness, that blindness, that obduracy, which he has chosen. From such a judgment—for it is of all time—may God in His mercy keep us.

God's word will always have its hearers. *If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.* Children of Abraham there will ever be, if even the stones must furnish them. *Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will listen also to it.*

Last of all the sacred history records in briefest summary the length of St Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, and its occupations. *He abode there two whole years in a hired dwelling of his own, and received all that went in to him; preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all freedom of speech, no one forbidding him.*

No words, alas, could be more suitable to a modern Christian congregation, none certainly more appropriate to the close of

more than a year and a half's course of Sermons, than those which describe the mixed results of Divine instruction even when an Apostle—nay, even when Christ Himself—was the preacher. There is a truthfulness as well as a pathos in the sound, a correspondence with experience as well as a presage of consequences, to which we shall do well to give betimes a serious and an earnest heed.

Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

1. So then the Gospel itself prepares us for its own disappointment. If men say to us, *How is it that a Revelation, supposed to be true, does not command a universal assent? how can God speak, and yet not convince? how can men refuse to Divine statements a credence which no sane person withholds from facts adequately proved by human testimony?* and then proceed to argue that therefore the Christian Revelation is not adequately proved; we answer, that at all events the record itself led us to expect the result which is complained of; warned us that its acceptance would not be universal; and bade us seek the explanation of this phenomenon elsewhere than in the deficiency or inconclusiveness of its proof. It is at least a remarkable thing, that a religion which speaks so authoritatively, which claims so confidently for itself a heavenly and a Divine origin, should yet declare itself to be come into the world, not for triumph, but for division; should inscribe on its pages the admission that of the earliest witnesses of the Resurrection *some doubted;* should give directions for the treatment of refusers as well as of accepters of the message; should state this as the effect of a long and detailed argument in its behalf on the part of its most earnest and persuasive advocate, that *some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.* We say of such a religion, that at least it has taken the sting, by anticipation, out of the argument from failure, and uttered a true prediction as to the degree and measure of its own success. Here, as elsewhere, we recognize that transparent truthfulness about

itself, which is one of the distinctive badges of the pure original Gospel.

2. On the other hand, it cannot be said that Christianity regards with indifference this various, this chequered result. It is the wish of some persons—the wish sometimes of idle unconcern, sometimes of human charity—to represent the Gospel simply as an offer; the presentation of something higher and better than nature dreamed of; the disclosure of *a more excellent way* for such as can walk in it; for the chance, as it were, of its finding, here and there, a tribe or an individual, whose sense of want or whose instinct of good it may either satisfy or stimulate. They will speak, or they will act, as though it were a good thing to be a Christian if you can, but not a fatal loss to be incapable of that attainment. To take pains to evangelize a new continent, or to press the Gospel upon a careless friend; to express a fear for the unbelieving, or to doubt the eternal repose of a soul gone to its account faithless; these things are looked upon as the baseless anxieties of superstition, or the uncharitable suspicions of self-righteousness. The Gospel is the luxury of the few, not the necessity of all.

It ought to be enough, in a Christian audience, to recall men to the plain words of Scripture; to say, The Gospel does not thus offer itself as for the equal alternative of acceptance or rejection; does not stand amongst men 'in the form of an inviting suppliant, having nothing but smiles and caresses wherewith to win the devotion of an admiring but thoughtless multitude;' does not pretend to be without terrors for the rejecter, or ignorant of the doom of him who shall have *received this grace of God in vain*. The Gospel, if it speaks truthfully—much more, if it speaks truly—does predict wrath as well as promise mercy: it misleads, ignorantly or else intentionally, if there be not as really an *eternal punishment* as a *life eternal*. The Gospel is not indifferent, though it be distinctly prescient, as to this *believing and believing not*.

3. When we strive to look below the surface, and to

discover why one believes and another believes not; why that proof which is equal for all should convince one and fail with another; why it is that God's rain and God's sunshine fertilize this spot and leave that barren; why reason and conscience, mind and soul, equal (in two instances) in vigour and capacity, should view with different eyes the selfsame disclosure; we are in the midst, at once, of those indeed *secret things* which *belong* wholly *to the Lord our God.* And we must be willing, unless we would make shipwreck at once of faith and charity, to leave all judgment in His hands, who, being the Lord of all, will assuredly do right. But in the midst of many speculations there is one thing practical. I would ask each member of this congregation, whether he does not find in himself a close connection between the state of his faith and the state of his life; whether he cannot, almost accurately, put together cause and effect, in such sense that, when he is at peace with his conscience, he is also most favourably disposed towards the Gospel; in other words, when he is living as he knows he ought to live, then he is not least but most convinced of the truth of Revelation, of the reality of Christ.

There are indeed cases—saddest and most perplexing of all—in which a good life seems to have parted company altogether with that faith which first perhaps reformed it. Cases, in which men of blameless lives, of honest endeavours and searchings after truth, nay, even of earnest prayers for the Divine teaching, cannot lay hold—or (more sorrowful still) have lost their hold—upon the distinctive revelations of the Gospel. But, pardon me if I say it positively, this is not your case. These are cases which do not occur once in a generation in common life. They belong to the seclusion of learned study: perhaps that seclusion itself may more than half explain them. Perhaps, if these doubts had been early dragged into action; if they had been brought face to face with the stern realities of a poor man's cottage, still more of sorrow and bereavement, of sickness and impending death; even they might have been dissipated: the

necessity of Christ might have been felt more than His distance, and the theoretical doubter might have become a practical Christian.

I say it again, This rare case is not your case. You, if you answer the question truthfully, in the secret of your own bosom, will say this; *There is a connection, in me, between unbelief and sin. When I am neglecting duty, when I am cherishing an evil temper, when I am unfaithful to life's relations, when I am yielding to some besetting temptation, when my conscience is not clear, nor my mind submissive, nor my heart clean, then it is that I put from me the faith of Christ; then it is that I feel doubts about God's Word; then it is that I become loose in my ideas of truth, and slack in my hold upon the things unseen. In short, when I am not good, then it is that I believe not.* Could any words more strongly express the evidence which the Gospel brings with it to us? If there be this practical connection, for us, between faith and virtue, then, without looking at others—without saying how it may be with nations which have not heard or with minds which cannot embrace the Gospel—we may at least understand how, for ourselves, not to believe is to be in peril, and to die unbelieving is to perish and to be condemned. The heart and the life have at least as much to do with faith as the understanding.

4. In the face of these unaccountable differences between man and man; some believing, and others (with advantages at least equal) believing not; we come, more and more as life advances, to rest, simply and trustingly, upon the declaration of Scripture, that faith itself is God's gift, the work of His Spirit, and commonly the direct answer to persevering prayer. We presume not, we believe it to be at present impossible, to state or to define to ourselves the logical coherence of the two fundamental doctrines of grace and responsibility. How, if God alone can give, man is condemned for not having; how, if some are chosen unto life, others are yet accountable for not finding it; how, if *God works in us to will and to do*, man must yet *work out*

his own salvation with fear and trembling. But, whatever may be the logical difficulty, there is little or no difficulty of practice or of the heart. If God gives, man must ask: if God promises to give to him that asks, he who asks not cannot complain if he has not.

And thus, for all practical purposes, it is enough to rest the case here. Are you asking? asking as of a real Person for a real gift? Do you deeply feel that you cannot give yourself faith? that faith, I mean, which is now in question? not a convinced understanding only, a mind familiar with Christian evidences, and contented to acquiesce in the received opinion of Christendom, but a heart resting upon Christ, and a life carefully conformed to His teaching? and feeling this, do you honestly and earnestly apply to God to give it you?

I do not believe in unanswered prayers. I do not believe in a man really and earnestly and humbly seeking God, and *seeking Him in vain.* I can understand his being kept waiting; waiting, that is, for a comfortable consciousness of being listened to; waiting for a bright light and for an assured hope. But I do not believe in a man dying an unbeliever, who has constantly and patiently prayed for faith. It would make me anxious about the truth of Christ, if I could believe it. But it wants proof. Yes, in spite of all assertions to the contrary, I believe that such a case yet waits for an example. *Every one that asketh,* our Lord says, *receiveth;* receives at last, if not instantly; receives, if he still prays on (as He Himself has taught us to do) and faints not; receives enough at least for safety, if not enough for peace. On that rock I will build: and when I am taunted with the doctrine of sovereign grace, or of Divine election, as introducing an idea of injustice, or even of inequality, into God's dealing with His creatures, I shall still say that practically the difference is made by a man praying or not praying; that he who believes is a praying man, and that he who believes not prays not.

5. It must be plain to every one here present, that, even

among professed Christians, there are still believing men and unbelieving. When the Scripture says, *Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not*, it does not speak of that sort of believing which consists only in an assent of the understanding. *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.* It is not every one here present who does that. We have listened, not without attention, to a course of fifty or sixty Sermons on this one Book of Scripture. And some have gone home, week by week, to review the passage commented on, to examine its details, to store up its instruction, and to take a livelier interest than before in this inspired history of the early fortunes of the Church of Christ. But O, my friends, is this enough? Does this, of itself, say anything as to the faith of the heart? Does this, of itself—yea, if it be multiplied a thousandfold—give any promise as to hope in death, as to happiness in eternity? Still, even among these—these our more attentive hearers—there may be some who believe the things spoken, and some who believe not: in other words, some who pray, and some who pray not; some, who cannot live without communion with God; some, whose daily struggle it is to *enter into the holiest*, where God is, *by the blood of Jesus;* and others, who are well contented to enjoy God's gifts, as in a far country, without one yearning after Him, without once saying in the deep of the heart, *I will arise and go to my Father.* Therefore, my brethren, it is still with us, as it was in the first days of the Gospel, an anxious, a fearful enquiry, Do we yet believe? If we do, we cannot sleep in indifference, we cannot rest in the world, we cannot live in sin. To believe is to see ourselves lost by nature and redeemed by the blood of Christ. To believe is to *live no longer to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again.* To believe is to *declare plainly*, by our whole spirit and conduct, that we *are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, seeking a better country, that is, an heavenly.* To believe is to have our *affection set on things above*, our very *life hidden with Christ in God.*

O God, grant that we may not be among those self-deluders, who shall say to Christ in the judgment, *We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets;* to whom nevertheless He shall answer and say, *I never knew you.* May we all so live, as in Thy sight; so *know Thee now by faith,* that *after this life we may have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead.*

THE END.

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